

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING DIGITAL CULTURE MAGAZINE

PIXEL ADDICT

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PLUS

- ▶ LEMMINGS GAMES SERIES
- ▶ COMMODORE SX-64
- ▶ SNK NEO GEO POCKET
- ▶ DOT MATRIX PRINTING

THE EVOLUTION OF BITMAP ART





PAUL
paul@addict.media

Favourite handheld console? The Game Boy Advance SP. I love the fold away design, plus it has two of the greatest *Fire Emblem* games.
Remember Games Workshop? I used to buy *White Dwarf* magazine to try and learn how to paint. The figures I bought were soon discarded.
Favourite comic growing up? *M.A.S.K.* was mine. I loved the cartoon TV show and toys. Also each issue came with a poster for my bedroom wall.



ANDREW
andrew@addict.media

Favourite handheld console? Atari Lynx. I never had one, but I didn't like the Game Boy and its rubbish display, and the Atari was in colour and just seemed cooler. The TV adverts definitely helped that image.
Remember Games Workshop? Nope, not my thing really, but I did admire the detail and care put into the models. I did Airfix models - does that count?
Favourite comic growing up? *The Dandy* and *The Beano*. One day I must make a cow pie!



DUNCAN
duncan@addict.media

Favourite handheld console? I really like the Vita! I bought the Tearaway pack and enjoyed the novel touch controls. Shame Sony let it die.
Remember Games Workshop? I played *Hero Quest* and *Space Crusade* on the Amstrad CPC and Amiga but that is it.
Favourite comic growing up? *Chips Comic* which was based on a kids TV show. Later it was *Garfield* and *TMNT*. Most recently, I got into the *IDW Transformers* series!



GARETH
gareth@addict.media

Favourite handheld console? I would have to go with the GBA. It was my first experience of the joy of a Nintendo launch.
Remember Games Workshop? I've bought their products but mostly during adulthood. I got a beautiful *Lord of the Rings* package as a gift. The kids and I massacred it.
Favourite comic growing up? *Asterix* and *Tintin* without a doubt, but there was also a healthy mix of Marvel, DC, *2000 AD* and Alan's choices!



ALAN
alan@addict.media

Favourite handheld console? The Nintendo DS. I loved the GBA SP but never had a backlit one. The DS still plays GBA SP games but with a way better screen and great battery life.
Remember Games Workshop? It's always looked cool but the only things I painted in my youth were Airfix model planes!
Favourite comic growing up? I used to regularly read *The Beano*, *Whizzer And Chips* and *The Dandy*. I'm showing my age here!



JOHN
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Favourite handheld console? The PSP. I spent a fortune buying the imported Japanese version that came with a whole 32MB Memory Stick storage card! *Loco Roco* - what a game!
Remember Games Workshop? Yes. I always loved the look and the idea of it but simply couldn't get into it myself.
Favourite comic growing up? *Commando* comic! When I was unwell. *Commando* and a bottle of Lucozade was the cure!

EDITORIAL

We have reached issue 15 of *Pixel Addict* already, as we enter Autumn of 2023. The dark nights are drawing in. It may be getting colder - well, it is in this part of the world - but it's not all doom and gloom (*Dunc - "That's true, there's Wolfenstein and Quake too!"*). There's plenty to read in this issue to keep you entertained and the winter blues at bay.

Our main feature has Phil South taking a step back in time, looking at the early days of bitmap graphics and their evolution. Each new generation of computers makes strides forward; more pixels, more colours, bigger and clearer sprites. As a magazine journalist for many years, Phil has seen it all. He also speaks to two old masters, Simon Butler and Shaun McClure, who answer Phil's questions about their careers and artistic journeys within the video games realm.

Chris McAuley returns with another article, this time examining a few of his favourite games based on Games Workshop tabletop titles. I loved playing so many of Chris' choices back in the 1990s and his roundup has made me want to get stuck into them again.

Any fans of the Neo Geo should be happy, we have two varied pieces on the console this issue. Mike Pittaro checks out a couple of recent and upcoming Neo Geo games, while Huxley Dunsany looks at another tech failure; the Neo Geo Pocket Color. It's a machine I've never owned but I remember GameStation stores selling them off cheap in 2004. Working on *PA* is an expensive duty sometimes, with so much interesting content tempting me to buy items I missed out on at release to try now!

We are saying goodbye to a regular contributor in this issue. Andrew Oyston, who explores Amstrad's NC100 for his final piece. Andrew has been with us since our first issue and I want to say thank you for all he has done for the magazine. Hopefully we'll see him return in the future.

Before I sign off, I want to address a small printing error in our previous issue. A rogue number 3 made its way into the title of Tom Williamson's Haiku OS article - sorry for any confusion. This has been fixed in our digital edition. Anyway, enjoy this issue and speak soon.

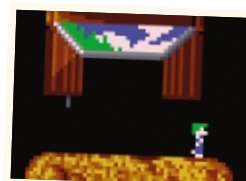
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"The *Pixel Addict* team would like to thank all of our contributors and readers, this publication would not be possible without you! We are also extremely grateful for the ongoing help and support we receive from our sponsors and fellow addicts over at *Amiga Addict* magazine."



Pixel Dust - the story of a bitmap graphics revolution (Page 29)



The Lemmings games series (Page 44)



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Welcome to Pixel Addict magazine!

Ver1.5 -- Year 2023

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Power

PIXEL ADDICT



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NEW GAMING VENUES

We love seeing the vintage gaming scene grow. Since last issue, two new venues have opened. ReCollect is a shop in Chester. Despite stocking plenty of retro gaming items they also focus on trading card games. ReCollect also host evening tabletop gaming tournaments playing titles such as *Yu-Gi-Oh* and *Magic: The Gathering*. We're told these nights are proving very popular. Find information on what's in store and the events coming up at: www.facebook.com/recollectcollectibles



The other venue is a new barcade near Bolton. Bytes Bar is run by Matthew Gorton who wants the venue to be a social hub for drinks and gaming. He told us he hopes to add classic consoles to the upstairs floor, accompanying the choice of groundfloor arcade cabinets already set up on freeplay. The venue is family friendly in the daytime, perfect for trying and beat the kids at *Guitar Hero* or showing off on *Donkey Kong*. Visit: www.bytes-westhoughton.co.uk



- The Latest News For Ageing Tech Fans



This is no Mini. The Atari 2600+ is a completely new follow-on from the company's iconic 1977 console. The cartridge slot is backwards compatible with original 2600 and 7800 carts, plus current games too.

MORE ATARI ACTION

It seems like nearly every issue Atari announce more products or reworkings of past glories. The Atari 2600+ console is due for release in November and recaptures the original 2600 look while offering a few modern upgrades... There is a HDMI port and it runs in widescreen for modern televisions. A 10-in-1 game cartridge is included, featuring well known Atari titles such as *Adventure* and *Missile Command*. Additional joysticks and game carts will also be available to order and Amazon will be the exclusive hardware distributor for the UK market. The release date is 17th November 2023, see: www.atari.com/collections/shop

EVEN MORE ATARI ACTION

Arcade 1Up have announced a new cabinet to celebrate Atari's 50th year. The deluxe cab comes with 64 games built in. Fourteen of which are arcade classics and the other 50 are lifted from their Atari 2600 home console. The cab features a 17" screen and is Wi-Fi enabled, so players can share their high scores with online friends. Find more at: www.arcade1up.com/products/atari-50th-anniversary-deluxe

"GIZZA JOB"

Good news for budding games developers. According to TIGA (the trade association representing the UK video games industry), general employment has risen 11.4%, with an increase of 18% for studios. The statistics were taken from December 2021 to April 2023 and were published in a definitive report on the state of the UK video games industry by TIGA, entitled *Making Games in the UK 2023*. The survey collected data on every aspect of employment within the sector.

FORGING A NEW SWORD

Point-and-click fans rejoice! *Broken Sword Shadow Of The Templars: Reforged* is due for release in early 2024. The game has 4K HD visuals and remastered audio. But fans of George and Nico have more to come from Revolution Software. A brand new adventure, *Broken Sword Parzival's Stone* is due out in 2024. Keep an eye on their website: www.revolution.co.uk



FLASHBACK FASHION

Flashback 2 (the long awaited sequel to the Amiga original) is due out this November for modern consoles. To capitalise on the 30th anniversary of *Flashback*, publisher Microïds is working with Athletes On The Mat (a leading name in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu attire). Their range of shorts, hoodies and apparel can be found at: www.air-conrad.com



As well as this, a *Flashback* themed soundtrack named *Music For Cloned Memory* is available to stream or buy on CD and limited edition green vinyl from: www.respawnedrecords.com

A WHAT?!

We love seeing new gaming books released and this one is no exception! *Curious Video Game Machines* by Lewis Packwood looks at some of the more obscure computers and consoles. Keep your overrated SNES or Mega Drive, we want to read about the Casio Loopy and RDI Halcyon! There are interviews with developers, creators and collectors. The book is 240 pages and due out 30th November 2023: www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Curious-Video-Game-Machines-Hardback/p/24332

BEATS AND PIECES

We've covered N64 game soundtracks being reworked by fans before. Now GameGrooves have released *Milk Bar: An EDM Tribute to Majora's Mask*. 15 producers have put their own style to some well known pieces of audio. Check it out here: www.gamegrooves.com/music/milk-bar

MOVE OVER LINK

Last issue we looked at a few examples of games which have randomiser hacks. Now, YouTuber and ROM hacker, Nes Draug has brought the world of Mario into Hyrule. *The Legend Of Super Mario* mod is still a *Zelda* game but with all of our favourite characters from the Mushroom Kingdom added. The player must help Mario rescue Princess Peach! Check out Nes Draug's hack (and others) here: www.youtube.com/NesDraug



GOODBYE OLD FRIEND

The NewTek Video Toaster has been covered previously over in our sister magazine *Amiga Addict*. Launched back in 1985, NewTek has been a well known name in video production. Sadly, the brand is no more. After being bought by Vizrt in 2019, NewTek products have been rebranded to their parent umbrella company's name. It's been a blast NewTek, now where is my Video Toaster t-shirt?

FPS-TASTIC

Nightdive Studios are getting a lot of love from fans of classic FPS games. Previously releasing remasters of *Quake*, *Turok* and

System Shock they have announced more. *Turok 3* and *Dark Forces* will be updated for modern machines later this year.

KEEP ON WALKIN'

The Hackaday website is great for checking the latest community inventions and tech ideas. One named *The Walk* caught our eye recently. Using AI, Google Maps and two rubber feet, Alfred Korzybski has created a virtual walking machine. It harnesses geolocation and weather data to adapt to the pre-programmed route chosen. Oh, it can also take photos of the places it visits! Check out the project at: www.hackaday.io/project/192682-the-walk



ANTSTREAM ADDITIONS

Antstream Arcade is adding more titles every week it seems. A few recent highlights include the scrolling beat 'em up *Age of Heroes: Silkroad 2* and the excellent shooter *Midnight Resistance* from the arcade. After *Harlequin* (Ed. - "A personal fave!") was added earlier this year, home computer fans can now play *Mr.*

Nutz: Hoppin' Mad and *First Samurai* (Amiga) and *Boulder Dash 3* (Amstrad CPC).

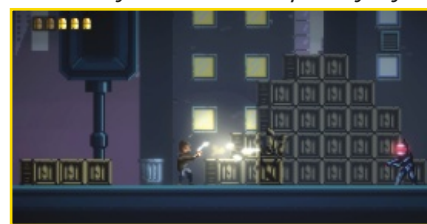


CUNNING STUNTS

The Commodore Plus/4 doesn't receive many new games. We covered the machine and a few recent titles in issue 13, but we have to give news of this latest game release a mention. *Stunt Car Racer* is a very impressive port by developer cobbpg and is similar to the Commodore 64 version. See the website: https://plus4world.powweb.com/software/Stunt_Car_Racer

SENTRY CITY

Publisher Flynn's Arcade have released a retro pixel art game for the Nintendo Switch. *Sentry City* is a cyberpunk styled side scroller. With plenty of unique levels and decent challenges you'll need quick reflexes. There's even a time attack mode to try and improve your skills once levels have been completed. Find information at: www.flynnsarcades.com/sentrycity



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

If you know of any events coming up or you're an event organiser, please email pixel@addict.media and let us know!

LEEDS COMIC-CON

15th October 2023, Leeds

The Royal Armouries will host Unleashed Events' large-scale pop culture show, this year entitled Star Wars Unleashed. Without a Trekkie in sight, may the Force be with you! Reserve tickets via: www.pixel.addict.media/starwarscon

EGX 2023

12th-15th October 2023, London

The biggest gaming show in the UK is a little later than usual. However, this may mean there is a chance to see and play some of the hottest games to close out 2023. Tickets: www.egx.net

RETROFEST 2023

4th & 5th November 2023, Cambridge

Held at the Centre of Computing History

in Cambridge. Retrofest 2023 will have many computing fans show off some of their latest projects for a variety of systems such as the SAM Coupé. This is one of the best computer shows in the UK, see www.computinghistory.org.uk for the latest announcements.

ADVENTURE X 2023

4th & 5th November 2023, London

If you're a fan of narrative driven games this show is for you! There will be some recent and upcoming games on show, as well as plenty of talks from games developers. Expect a write up soon. Details at: www.adventureexpo.org

CRASH LIVE! 2023

18th November 2023, Kenilworth

Speccy owners will be in their element once again. The Holiday Inn Kenilworth hosts plenty of machines and stalls. Guest speakers so far include Charles Cecil, Tony Warriner and Ian Oliver.



Your POINTS of VIEW

What's your opinion?
Send letters to pixel@addict.media

It's time to shiver and shake as Halloween approaches! We wanted to know your favourite horror games or those which did a great job of scaring you.

TWITTER

@xDainty_Dovex

I'm aware *Killer Frequency* isn't a retro game but it has a retro 1980s aesthetic. Plus, it's set two years before I was born. "Crying For Help" by The Flow is my favourite from this soundtrack: <https://youtu.be/emDyVircv4o>

@TimRachor

Alone In The Dark! Always a fave! Also *Last Half of Darkness* was extremely scary for me as a kid.

@loudscotsbloke

You can't really ask that question and not mention the absolutely fabulous ZX81 game *3D Monster Maze*!! Yes it was low res, yes it was black and white, and yes it had no sound.. BUT.. the fear, the suspense, the mad rush to the next corner. Rex lies in wait.

@dannyleemorris

The first *Silent Hill*. I'm pretty sure it darkened my soul...

@Indie_RetroNews

Realms of the Haunting!

@jkaratsis

The House Abandon. Genius concept.

FACEBOOK

Paul Rand

Alien Isolation in VR!

Andy Bowes

The first *Silent Hill* really had its moments, especially running around in the fog and going into abandoned hospitals and schools.



Realms of the Haunting.



Project Firestart.

Dean Mortlock

Resident Evil 7 in PSVR - the single most terrifying gaming experience ever! The best one though, *Silent Hill 2*.

Frank O'Connor

Not joking! OG *Boulderdash* on C64 would scare the absolute chocolate custard out of me when the screen force scrolled, revealing a deadly butterfly thing with an apocalyptic "KLANG!"

Alan Grapes

Has to be *Silent Hill*, that was frikkin' terrifying...

Mat Allen

Project Firestart for the Commodore 64. Pretty much ground zero for many of the survival horror tropes we take for granted today. If you've never played it, you really owe yourself to do so.

Phil South

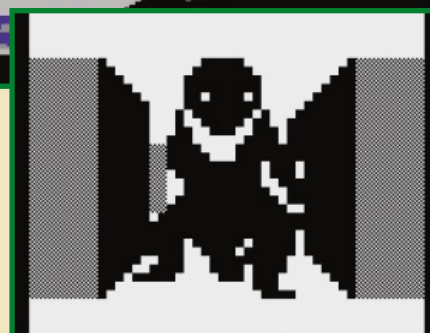
Silent Hill all day long!

Adam Sawkins

Beyond The Forbidden Forest.

Lee James Peake

Silent Hill, *Resident Evil*, *Siren Blood Curse* on the PS3 were all really creepy, *Dead*



3D Monster Maze.

Space also. VR wise I'd go for a game called *Dreadhalls*.

Peter Ward

Does *Alien Breed* count? (Ed. - "Yes it does Peter.")

Dean Collins

The Haunting on Sega Mega Drive.

Andy Godoy

Silent Hill 2, it was a different type of horror, it played with my mind like no game before.

I'd seen blood and guts in games before but nothing that messed with my mind like this game.

Brian Heaps

Resident Evil Village was great, much more to it than expected. *Project Zero* is great also.



Haunting Starring Polterguy.



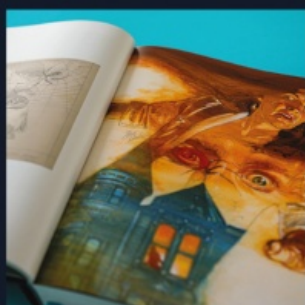
Silent Hill.

BITMAP BOOKS PRESENTS

THE ART OF THE BOX

A visually stunning celebration of the artists who created the cover art for generations of video games

www.theartofthebox.shop





PIXELS 'N' POPCORN

- Mortal Kombat Kontinued

Welcome back to the realm of Outworld, readers, as we continue our blood-soaked excursion through the *Mortal Kombat* cinematic universe. Yes, that's a thing that exists. Sort of.

In last issue's PnP Versus Mode special, we witnessed a battle for supremacy between the live-action *Mortal Kombat* movie from 1995 and the identically-named reboot from 2021. The whole thing ended on a surprisingly positive note with both films turning out to be a right laugh, and everybody skipped off into the sunset for tea and biscuits.

Now, however, the time for Friendship is over, and Endurance Mode must begin. Because, lords help us, we still have to watch and evaluate the live-action sequel to *MK 1995*, along with a whole bunch of animated *MK* features. And nothing, *nothing* can prepare you for just how crap some of these films are. Mercy!

Mortal Kombat Annihilation

Released: 1997

Director: John R Leonetti

Starring: Robin Shou, Talisa Soto, James Remar, Brian Thompson, Sandra Hess, Lynn "Red" Williams

By the time the first *MK* movie hit theatres in 1995, the *Mortal Kombat* series of arcade fighting games was up to its third entry, and the hype surrounding the franchise was buzzing. The film's financial success and sequel-bait ending made a follow-up seem like a certainty, and producer Lawrence Kasanoff fast-tracked production on *Mortal Kombat Annihilation* to capitalise on the popularity of its predecessor. The plan was simple: to do more of what everybody liked about the first flick. More characters from the games! More fights! More elaborate sets and visual effects!



James Remar as Raiden (on the left; and yes, we know they spell it with a Y in the credits, but stuff that) and Brian Thompson as Shao Kahn in *Mortal Kombat Annihilation*. The strange angular white aura around the characters is what happens when you shoot the opening scene in bright sunshine, and then decide to make the sky all dark and moody in post-production, and then never give the visual effects a second pass in order to tidy them up. This movie was released in cinemas.

Infamously, things went really very badly wrong indeed.

With original director Paul Anderson otherwise engaged on *Event Horizon*, Kasanoff chose the first flick's cinematographer, John R Leonetti, to helm the \$30m sequel – this despite the fact he'd never directed anything previously. Of the principal cast, only Robin Shou and Talisa Soto reprised their roles as Liu Kang and Kitana respectively – the parts of Sonya, Johnny Cage and Raiden were recast, depriving us of more fun with Bridgette Wilson, Linden Ashby and Christopher Lambert. The script was so focused on cramming in as many new characters as possible, to facilitate as many fight scenes as possible, that there was practically no story to speak of. Most egregiously of all, the movie was never properly completed – after a rough edit was well-received by test audiences, distributors New Line Cinema decided to just stick it into cinemas as it was.

The end result is an extraordinary mess, with an overstuffed cast delivering laughable dialogue ridiculously badly, a borderline incomprehensible plot full of cavernous holes, and special effects that are an insult to the words "special" and "effects". Even the fights are rubbish, mostly consisting of the participants leaping around like their shoes are on fire.

And yet. And yet, and yet, and yet. *Mortal Kombat Annihilation* is *vastly* entertaining.

From the cringeworthy acting to the blatantly unfinished CGI monsters, this is a film so generously inept, in ways you almost never see in big-budget releases from major studios, that it's an absolute hoot to watch. It's never boring, and it's often hysterically funny. Truly, the phrase, "so bad it's good" could have been invented for it.

Go into this one shorn of the expectations you might have had as an *MK* fan back in 1997, be ready to embrace the badness, and you'll have just the best of times. Seriously.

Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins

Released: 1995

Director: Joseph Francis

...Which is more than can be said for this bumdrizzle.

Released straight to video a few months



"Hey, Sonya, why the long face? No, seriously, WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR FACE?"

ahead of *Mortal Kombat* (1995), *The Journey Begins* bills itself as an animated movie prequel to the live-action film. But in fact, weirdly, it's a 38-minute "animated" retelling of the first half of *MK 1995*. And it *really* deserves those quote marks.

Things start with Liu Kang, Sonya and Johnny Cage aboard Shang Tsung's boat, heading for the island where the *Mortal Kombat* tournament is happening. Suddenly the three are accosted by sinister ninjas Scorpion and Sub-Zero, but Raiden intervenes. All the characters are poorly hand-drawn, and all the backgrounds are badly-rendered CG. Everything looks crummy.

Raiden relates the histories of Shang Tsung, Goro and the ninjas in a trio of motion-captured fully-CG flashbacks, which somehow manage to look worse than everything else. Then our heroes are attacked by clones of Baraka (you know, the fangy sword-armed bloke from *MKII*), so they fend off the monsters by repeating the same fighting moves over and over again, and then it all stops. The final 15 minutes of the video contain a "making of" feature for *MK 1995*, which is easily the most entertaining part of the whole exercise.

Shoddily made, boring and pointless, *The Journey Begins* feels like the pilot for an abandoned *MK* animated series that the creators bunged into stores to take advantage of people looking forward to the movie proper. Yuck.

Mortal Kombat Legends: Scorpion's Revenge

Released: 2020

Director: Ethan Spaulding

Created to tie in with *Mortal Kombat* (2021), *Scorpion's Revenge* is the first in a new series of straight-to-video *MK* movies produced by Warner Bros. Animation, and there are two immediately striking things about it.

By Matthew Smith

@Amiga_Square

@amigasquared

soundcloud.com/matthewsmith2



"GET OVER HERE! Bring popcorn."

1. An 18 certificate.
2. It looks and sounds *massively* superior to any previous animated project bearing the MK name.

The story is, once again, a reworking of MK 1995's plot – everyone sails to a spooky island to fight in a deadly mystical tournament – but with a particular emphasis placed on Scorpion's part in the proceedings. Unlike *The Journey Begins* however, this is a *very* fresh take on the material.

It takes a bit of getting used to tone-wise, as it attempts to balance startlingly graphic violence (including, within the first 10 minutes, the bloody demise of a tiny child) with the comic boobery of Johnny Cage (voiced by Joel McHale, who makes the character the funniest he's ever been). But eventually it wins you over with fantastically dynamic action scenes, an excellent voice cast and some priceless jokes, as well as a few welcome plot twists to shake up the MK formula.

Definitely *not* one for family viewing,



Kung Lao (voiced, briefly, by Matthew Yang King) comes a cropper courtesy of Shao Kahn (Fred Tatasciore) in *Battle Of The Realms*. Ooh, that's a bit of a nasty nick, isn't it?

though. So many loppings and chopplings.

Mortal Kombat Legends: Battle Of The Realms

Released: 2021

Director: Ethan Spaulding

A direct sequel to *Scorpion's Revenge*, this is more or less an animated retelling of *Mortal Kombat Annihilation*, only – shock horror vicar exclusive! – made competently.

As in the 1997 film, Liu Kang and company have to fight off an invasion of Earth by Outworld emperor Shao Kahn, and a whole load of characters and story threads from various MK games are crowbarred into the narrative. There's also a new B plot in which Sub-Zero and Scorpion get drawn into the machinations of mad god Shinnok, who's out to destroy all of reality.

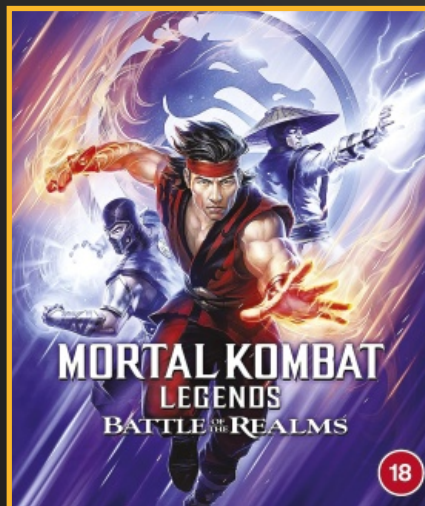
Battle Of The Realms threatens to end up with too much happening for its own good; some characters are introduced purely for the sake of killing them off unpleasantly, and the two main storylines only coalesce a few minutes before the end. Mostly, though, it's as stylishly entertaining as the preceding movie; the fight scenes are numerous, neatly varied and gratifyingly thumpy, the visuals and vocal performances are top-notch, and there's some truly eye-popping gore. In both senses.

Mortal Kombat Legends: Snow Blind

Released: 2022

Director: Rick Morales

Now this is interesting. Set several



This one really does show up *Annihilation* something rotten.



"He's behind you!"

decades after the events of *Realms*, *Snow Blind* is an original tale revolving around the character of Kenshi, a telekinetic sightless swordsman first introduced in *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*, the fifth main instalment in the game series.

Following attacks by hordes of mindless undead revenants, Earth has been reduced to a desert wasteland with only a handful of isolated townships remaining. These communities are ruled over by a cybernetically-enhanced Kano, aided by his gang of ruthless thugs – known as the Black Dragon – and an elderly Shang Tsung. After being beaten, blinded and left for dead by the villains, a young Kenshi finds he can still see with the aid of a magic sword – and with guidance from an aged and reclusive Sub-Zero, he resolves to free the land from Kano's tyranny.

Grittily atmospheric, action-packed and brutally bloody, *Snow Blind* has the same high production quality as its predecessors along with a more consistent tone and a more focused story. It's the most satisfying and surprising of the MK Legends films released to date, and I look forward to seeing where the series goes next.

CONTINUE? 10...9...8...

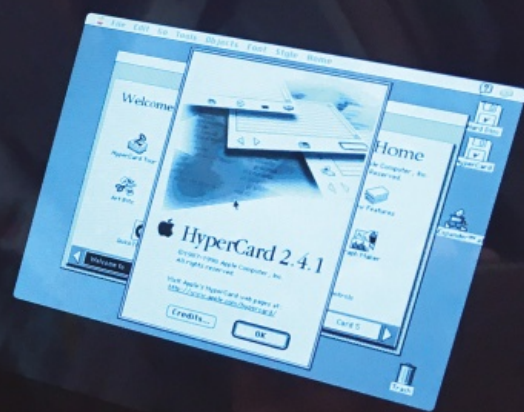
A fourth MK Legends movie is set for release in October this year, and from the looks of the trailer, it's going to be a riot. Subtitled *Cage Match*, it's set in the 1980s with a visual style that evokes that decade to a tee, and its protagonist is – of course – Johnny Cage, played once again by Joel McHale. Outstanding! 🍿



HyperCard

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HyperCard 2.4 seen running under Linux and Mini vMac emulation on an original 2012 Raspberry Pi 1 Model B.

MEMORIES OF APPLE'S HYPERCARD

- When life in the 1990s with Macintosh just about 'stacked up'

Back in *Pixel Addict* issue 10, whilst introducing myself and my YouTube channel: Wi-Fi Sheep Tech, I explained my rather unorthodox childhood when it came to my early exposure to computers and technology during the 1990s. For myself, basically it consisted of an 8-bit BBC Micro at school and a 32-bit Apple Macintosh at home.

At this time, next to no-one I knew owned or had even heard of Apple products or the Macintosh. Remember, at this point in time we're still a good 15 years away from the first iPhone being introduced. So the fact my parents had a Motorola 68000 series (aka 68k) Macintosh Performa 360 at home as our family's first and only computer was really quite unusual.

With an unusual computer came an unusual exposure to an array of software and application programs. Many no doubt were almost household names in North America, thanks in part to Apple's dominance in the US education market, but these titles would be almost totally obscure here in the UK.

One such software package was Apple's *HyperCard*, which for me as a child of the

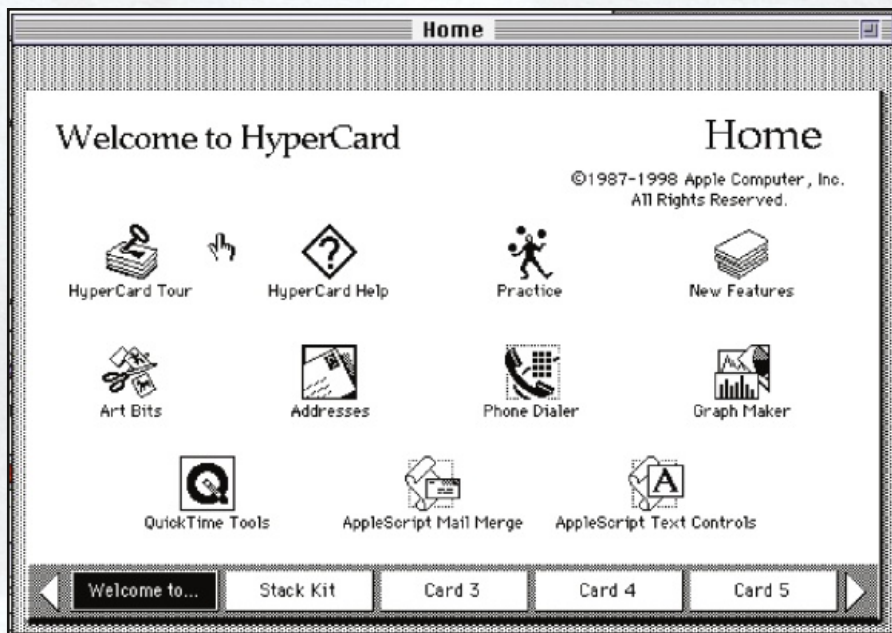
1990s was brilliant but also totally frustrating to use at the same time!

What Is HyperCard?

Many a writer, journalist, podcaster and even YouTuber have tried to explain what exactly *HyperCard* was or is. In

truth, it's one of many things, for which it was the original trailblazer back in 1987, when it first appeared as a free bundled product with new Macintosh computer systems of the time.

HyperCard was developed by Bill Atkinson,



The HyperCard 'Home' stack greets its users every time you open the application.

By Tom Williamson

YouTube.com/wifisheep

@Wifisheep



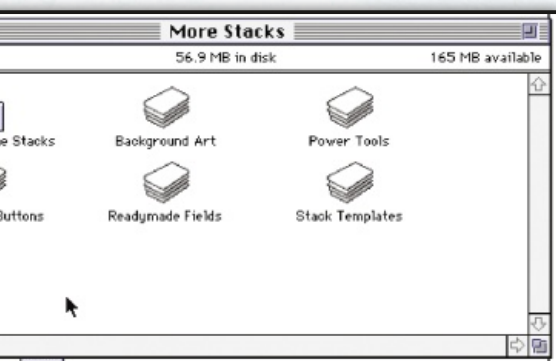
a software developer at Apple and a member of the original development team behind the first Macintosh 128k from 1984.

Like the first Apple Mac system OS, *HyperCard* was written in the Pascal programming language, although users of the product actually programmed or scripted it in its own internal HyperTalk language.

HyperCard was one of the first true multimedia age authoring applications, allowing users to create media content and hold information for others to access and use, through the use of 'Cards' which could contain bitmap graphics, text fields, buttons and hyperlinks to jump to other cards or perform tasks or functions, very much how a database or even modern web browser works today.

However, *HyperCard* was more than just a database, its cards could also act like slides, allowing it to be used for presentations rather like *Powerpoint*. It also had rather good graphics and drawing capabilities, albeit only in 1-bit black and white, which for the mid to late 1980s wasn't really an issue.

Stacking Cards Into The 1990s



User generated documents are saved to 'Stack' files under *HyperCard* seen here in the main *MacOS System 7*.

Most of the information, text, graphics and cards generated from within *HyperCard* were saved as a document known as a Stack which were largely self-contained, meaning all data was held within the stack file itself, making the format very portable.

Later additions allowed *HyperCard* to play sound and audio clips, these could be real time digitised sound that could be recorded directly into a stack.

Version 2.3, released around 1996,

added new embedded features such as support for embedding the *QuickTime* video format, and for the very first time, in stack colour.

The colour was added via the implementation of resource forks known as externals. These consisted of extra program code written in C or Pascal outside of *HyperCard* and then compiled into the stack document, allowing *HyperCard* to call or even modify resource forks of the main Apple *MacOS* of the time, hence allowing for things such as on-screen colour, video etc.

I Wanted To Make DOOM!

Using *HyperCard* as a child was a truly frustrating experience. In the days before the internet (and hence user tips) was widespread, getting it to do anything remotely cool or interesting as a slightly impatient child was really difficult.

You see, I wanted to make games like *DOOM* or even things I was seeing on video gaming systems, such as the Nintendo 64 and Sony PlayStation. None of which was ever going to happen!

HyperCard was a product of the mid-1980s and for the most part it stayed that way. It did lots of things, database, graphics, presentations, OS application shells etc. But it just didn't really do any of them very well or very fast. Even with updates from Apple through the 1990s, it continued to show its age.

When It No Longer Stacked Up – The End

Development of *HyperCard* ceased in 1998 as it fell to the product axe swinging following the return of Steve Jobs to Apple a year earlier in 1997. Officially Apple stopped retail sales of the product in 2004, long into the UNIX *MacOS X* era.

It is interesting that *HyperCard* was never ported to the UNIX based *MacOS X*, meaning *MacOS 9.2.2* (released December 2001) was the very last classic era Apple OS that technically could run *HyperCard*, although from my recollection it didn't run all that well on the latest Apple iMacs or eMacs of the era!

Come the early 2000s, I was in my early teens

and like so many, had moved on into the then exciting futuristic world of web programming, with HTML and even building interactive content in *Macromedia* (later *Adobe*) *Flash*, which in many ways was rather like *HyperCard*, except it was in full colour, ran on the internet and was cross platform compatible with Windows!

The small fact that *Flash* content was painful to use online over a 56k dial-up modem was not the point! And as a young teenager, I didn't have to pay the phone bills!

Want To Play?

Probably one of the best projects ever created with *HyperCard* was the early 3D click and point adventure game *Myst* from developer Cyan Worlds (known just as Cyan at the time). The original 1993 Macintosh CD-ROM retail version of the ►



An original boxed copy of Cyan *Myst* on CD-ROM for the Macintosh.



A static pre-rendered, 3D still from the classic *Myst*.

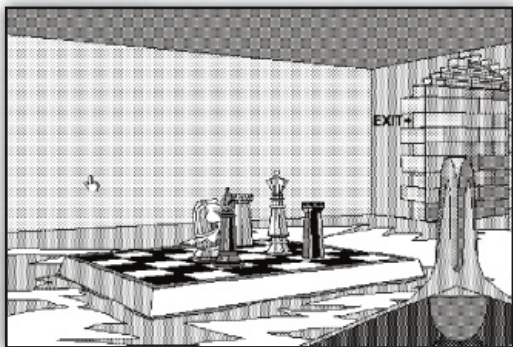
game used *HyperCard* as a *shell* with a huge number of externals and plugins for the support of colour, sound and early *QuickTime* video media content.

Although still very impressive even today, it was still *HyperCard* under the bonnet so *Myst* relied on pre-rendered 3D cards or slides for each frame of movement, hence the in-game worlds were not real live vector 3D, unlike later rebuilds of the game such as *Real Myst*.

Even before *Myst*, Cyan created some of



The open splash screen to Cyan's *Cosmic Osmo*.



Gameplay screen from *The Manhole*, also by developers Cyan Worlds.



A game of *Battle Ships* as created by the *HyperCard* team and playable in your browser on [Internetarchive.org](https://archive.org).

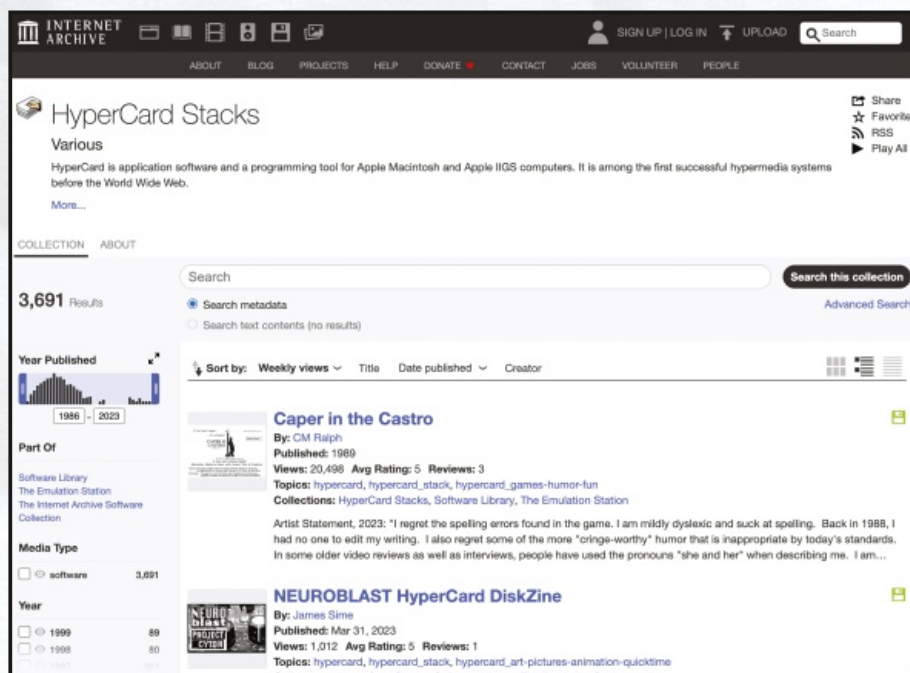
the best *HyperCard* content ever seen, and their earlier works *Cosmic Osmo* and *The Man Hole* are masterpieces in their own right.

These early Macintosh titles look visually stunning despite being confined to the original 1-bit black & white of *HyperCard*'s internal bitmap graphics engine, and are a testament to what could be achieved if you knew what you were doing!

HyperCard Lives in the 2020s... Online
If you're curious, and want to take a look

at *HyperCard* and the world of custom user generated stacks for yourself, then today it couldn't be easier!

Online, the Internet Archive hosts a huge number of *HyperCard* projects that can be run live in a browser, meaning you don't even need to install or set up anything on your home system. You don't even need to be a Mac user for this to work! Just click on a stack that interests you and away you go! See: <https://archive.org/details/hypercardstacks>



[Internetarchive.org](https://archive.org) hosts a number of online *HyperCard* stacks to play with.

Alternatively if you're happy to do a little more setup and technical tinkering, then there are a number of Macintosh emulators available such as *Sheepshaver*, *Basilisk* and my personal favourite *Mini vMac* (see: www.gryphel.com/c/minivmac). The latter runs well on top of Raspbian Linux on the Raspberry Pi, but is also available for x86 Windows, Linux and modern MacOS.

Retro achieve site MacintoshGarden.org can also be a great place for sourcing required components. But please remember your legal obligations when using or downloading from such online resources.

Personally I've found *HyperCard* to be an interesting, if not slightly obscure slice of Apple history, one that I actually lived through and are curious to re-visit from time-to-time. But saying that, at the same time, one that I'm so happy not to have to use in anger anymore!



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TEMPLEMAN'S TREASURES

- Are you keeping up with the Commodore SX-64?

I thought that I would write about something a wee bit different this month. As you are probably aware from previous issues of *Pixel Addict*, I have around 150 machines in my collection. These are mostly the obscure oddballs and misfits of the 1970s and 1980s micro world. In this article though I am going to be writing about the Commodore 64. Not very obscure, nor an oddball I hear you cry! Ahhh... but... this is no ordinary C64. Today we will be discussing the oddity that is the Commodore SX-64.

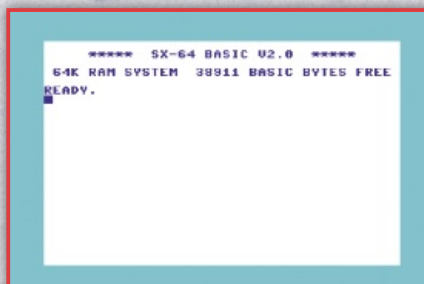
Unlike the original C64, the SX-64 was not a success. It struggled to get any traction in the marketplace. It does however, hold the accolade of being the world's first colour portable computer. When I say portable, I really mean luggable - weighing in at an arm breaking 10.5KG!

Beginnings...

The SX-64 entered the market in 1984, and just like the original C64, had 64KB of RAM, a 6510 CPU and the much loved SID chip sound. On top of all of that, full C64 compatibility (well... almost full). You got a built in 5" CRT monitor, built in 5.25" disk drive, a fold away keyboard and a lovely case with a heavy duty carry handle/stand. "But this all sounds wonderful!" I hear you cry.. and it is. However, the SX-64 was a complete flop. Sales were slow, and minimal.

How Much?

Commodore was marketing the SX-64 as a business machine, but failed to support any real business applications. Then there was the cost. Bear in mind that this was 1984, so the original Commodore 64 had been out for two years by now, and was selling for a much reduced retail price. The SX-64 however, hit the market with



Not your standard Commodore blue on blue. The SX-64 goes for something a little bit easier to read on a 5" CRT.

a \$1,000 price tag, roughly four times the cost of the original C64. Even Commodore's adverts showing a businessman using the SX-64 by the pool side wasn't enough to spur on sales.

Compatible

The system itself is more or less fully compatible with the original C64, so will run 99% of all C64 software. The only exceptions are the very few games that specifically looked for the cassette interface. The SX-64 doesn't have a cassette interface, and is purely a disk drive based system. In fact the ROM has been slightly changed so that the standard **shift+run/stop** actually executes a **load""*,8,1** command rather than the standard load for the datasette.

Blue Is The Colour...

You may have also noticed that the familiar Commodore blue boot screen isn't part of the SX-64. It's a pale blue (almost cyan) background, with a white centre text area. This change helps with reading text on the small 5" screen. Talking about that screen, if you were to read any reviews of the SX at the time, the reviewers always slated the screen for being too blurry, small or wishy washy and the like. I would like to set the record straight. My SX-64 has its original 5" CRT, and the



All closed up and ready for the user to pick it up and travel to the next pool side office.

screen is fantastic. The colours are bright, graphics are clear.. and yes, the phosphor shadow mask can make certain colours of text look a bit grainy, but on the whole, the screen is awesome. When I take my SX to retro shows, most people comment on just how good the tiny screen is, and then normally ask me if I have changed it for a more modern equivalent. No, no I haven't.

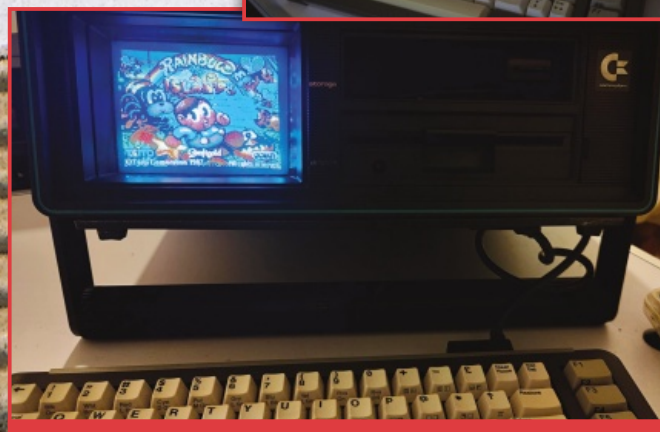
Love At First Sight

So what's the SX-64 like to use? Well, I have to say it's my favourite C64, not only because it's the oddball of the C64 family but because it is a really well thought out platform. Having a built-in disk drive, screen and keyboard is awesome. It's portable (ish..) and has a magnificent presence. Just look how lovely it is!

Compatibility with the standard C64 meant that most games could be run on the SX-64.



Full Commodore keyboard, and built in 5.25" disk drive.



The 5" CRT is bright and clear, allowing the SX-64 to show off all those 16 colours.

By Roy Templeman



Connectivity

The SX-64 comes with a cartridge port on the top, so you can use all the modern multi carts (Kung Fu and the like) as well as all the standard (minus the cassette) ports on the back for additional screens, disk drives, joysticks and user port addons (SD2IEC for example). The SX-64 is difficult to track down in the UK (slightly easier in the USA), and these days has a hefty sale price not far from that original RRP in 1984.

Verdict

The SX-64 was a flop; gamers didn't want

it, as the screen was too small. Business people didn't want it, as there were no real business apps. Kids lusted over it, but at \$1,000 dollars it was out of reach for most. The SX-64 struggled on to 1986, and was then quietly removed from the Commodore line up. There was talk of a DX-64 which would have dual disk drives, but this never appeared. There was even a rumour of an Amiga based version using the same case... but the world had moved on, and Commodore were struggling to keep up. The SX-64 has pride of place in my collection.

Treasures Rating: 3 (Rare)



The SX-64 doesn't have a cassette port, but most games didn't care. You load from disk, cart or nowadays SD.



A dual disk drive version never arrived, so the space becomes a handy store/shelf.



All the controls for the lovely CRT are hidden away inside this door on the front panel.

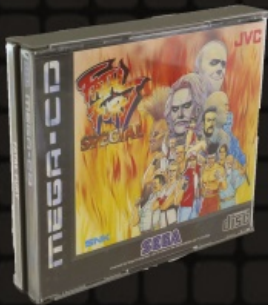
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— TIMELESS GAMING CONVENTION —

- Paul experiences a gaming buffet at Arcade Club

I'm always up for a trip to Arcade Club in Bury. Dubbed "Europe's Biggest Arcade" there's plenty to keep you busy for the day. So what happens when you add more aspects of gaming to the venue?

The answer is the Timeless Gaming Convention. Organised by Twitch streamers Paul Spicer (Middle Aged Gaming Guy) and Aimee Thompson (AimeeEve) they aimed to showcase creativity in the gaming community.

I'd been invited along to be part of one of the panel talks so was eager for the day to start. The doors opened at 10am for VIP ticket holders - the extra cost of these tickets provided early entry, a goody bag including a game, a meal voucher and a few other bits. Oh, and it also meant you had first choice on game challenges (more on that later).

By general entry at 11am I'd already met Peter Ward for the first time ever despite us having spoken online for almost a decade! He runs the Retro Gamesmaster website and was the host for the main talk panel later in the day. Within that first hour I made a whistle stop tour around all four floors of the venue. Bumping into friends, grabbing some pictures and seeing a VERY busy host making sure everyone was ok. The talk panels were spread out from 12.30pm - 6.30pm but there was no chance of getting bored at any point. The charity Everyone Can had a stall offering a chance to try some games which help those with disabilities embrace gaming - something which more companies are getting involved in. This is a topic we hope to be covering in a future issue.



Outrun 2 is always a massive draw for gamers! Just non-stop arcade fun!

There were various sellers including Wave Games who had several recent Dreamcast titles. DJ Collectibles had loads of popular merchandise such as various Funko Pop figures, Five Nights At Freddy's plush toys (my son ordered me to buy one!) and plenty of sweets and drinks. Geek Retreat offered similar items but also had several board games to buy as well as play. Tables were set up with some titles to try out, luckily the Geek Retreat staff and fellow punters were eager enough to teach any newbies the rules. Even at 9pm the games were still going! Lightgun Retro Gaming had plenty of console games for sale, and luckily a lot of bargains, but it was the stall next to them which peaked my interest...

MBPUK (Manual Booklet Prints UK) had recently been interviewed for The Retro Hour podcast. Rowan, the man behind it, has been producing high quality Nintendo

Switch manuals for some of the biggest titles such as *Super Mario Odyssey*, *Mario Kart 8* and *Zelda Breath of the Wild*. If you miss having something to read with your Switch games check out Rowan's work here www.etsy.com/market/mbpuk

Simran Whitham from FORMAT Gaming nights opened the talks. He explained why events such as this were important for the North of England which has returned as a major area for the games industry. Then it was our turn to talk as part of the Gaming In Journalism panel, made up of myself, Ian from *Amiga Addict*, Daniel Crocker from *Debug* and Andrew Dickinson, author of *The Dreamcast Years*. The panel host Paul McNally (ex games journalist for *Amiga Action* and *PlayStation*



Peter Ward hosts the Legends Panel to finish the afternoon.



The Mario Kart 8 tournament had plenty of volunteers.



It was great to be on stage with fellow writers, including Ian from Amiga Addict.



The Nintendo Switch manuals from MBPUK are brilliant.

Pro) spent 45 minutes asking us about the challenges of producing regular print products, our favourite magazine memories and more. Following this were panels with various content creators, including podcasters, YouTubers and Twitch streamers. Topics included *what makes good content*, and *times when shows haven't gone to plan* - we have all had tech issues at some time! Then it was the main Gaming Legends panel at 5pm.

The Gaming Legends panel included Rich Stevenson (Gremlin), Adam Sawkins (Criterion, EA), Nick Clarkson (Team 17, Gremlin, Ocean), Paul Machacek (Rare) and Kev Bayliss (Rare, Playtonic). With so many years of experience between them there was no shortage of anecdotes. Asked about their biggest challenges, which included Adam recalling 18 hour days whilst working on *Burnout* titles, and Nick admitting *Dennis* from Ocean (which was based on the movie) had several missing levels due to it being rushed out; there was some great insight into how it wasn't always plain sailing. Adam also shared how he came close to working on *Outrun 2* whilst at EA but a cancelled *Skate Or Die* title was the focus at the time. Paul Machacek told us how he fell in love with gaming from an early age and was creating and submitting games to publishers from the age of 15.



The stalls were well priced and had a decent selection of goodies.

One instance resulted in a trip to London, being offered a contract and having to turn it down as he was still at school - his parents were unaware. Both Paul and Kevin discussed their experiences at Rare working on the likes of *Battletoads*, *Diddy Kong Racing* and *Banjo Kazooie*. Rich covered key parts of his career at Gremlin including his proudest moment, which was working on *Actua Soccer*. A brilliant talk all around!

Between talk panels there were challenges for *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Tetris* and *Mario Kart 8* with the crowd and commentators both getting behind the challengers - I'd be too nervous to try one myself especially for all to see on a big screen!

DJ Mike Storm had travelled over from Canada to play various dance and house music in the evening. Luckily an area had been cleared to form a dance floor. If the music wasn't to your taste all the arcade and pinball machines were still available to get stuck into. Ian from *Amiga Addict* and I challenged each other to a few games. Before we knew it, 10pm hit and it was time to leave. A brilliant day and an event which opened my eyes a bit more to how much work goes into other areas of gaming related entertainment.



Charity stall Everyone Can had games set up and also had prizes to be won. Find out more info here www.everyonecan.org.uk



The Hosts Speak

How do you feel after the first Timeless event:

MAGG - "Clearly we put on something way bigger and better than our previous event and the reactions on social media and feedback has been outstanding. It's great to see so many people saying they thought this was the best gaming event of the year so far."

Aimee - "I'm absolutely thrilled after the success of the first Timeless event! It's been an incredible journey to bring together gamers, developers, and enthusiasts in a celebration of gaming culture. The positive energy and enthusiasm from everyone who attended has left me feeling grateful and excited for the future of Timeless."

Any particular highlights?

Aimee - "There were so many it's hard to narrow it down! One standout moment was the panel discussions and keynote speakers that sparked insightful conversations about the industry's direction, and the retro gaming section brought waves of nostalgia to attendees."

MAGG - "I think the panels were the highlight for me - Gaming Journalism and our Content Creators panel went down a storm and loads of people said they were so thankful for the content we put on. The icing of the cake being our Legends panel - it will be difficult to top that next year."

Will Timeless return in 2024?

Aimee - "Yes, the plan is to definitely bring back Timeless in 2024! The overwhelming response and positive feedback from this year's event have solidified our commitment to making Timeless an annual tradition. As for improvements, we're constantly looking for ways to enhance the experience. We're aiming to expand the event even further, potentially including more interactive workshops, a broader range of gaming topics in the panels, and an even more diverse selection of games across different platforms and genres. Our goal is to continue growing Timeless while staying true to its core mission of celebrating the gaming community and industry."

PRINTING WITH DOTS....

- Andrew makes an impression with a noisy but much-loved technology

There's one memory from my teenage years that is seared into my brain. It's 1992 and I'm 15 years old. I'm at my black corner desk in my bedroom. It's the evening and it's dark outside, a spotlight clipped to my pine cabin bed providing the only light. My Amiga 500 is in front of me, 14" TV on the left, Panasonic KXP-1081 9-pin dot matrix printer on the right. Music plays quietly from the Sony hi-fi. It's peaceful.

Loaded on the Amiga is Workbench 1.3 and PageSetter v1.2, a DTP package. Also loaded is *Deluxe Paint IV*. All running within 1MB of RAM! The image on the screen is provided over the RF link and is a bit fuzzy. But my young eyes don't care.

The task is to create an essay describing how nuclear power works. I draw a picture of a nuclear reactor in *DPaint*. A mixture of encyclopaedias and a magazine article plus my school notes provide the necessary information to create the two pages requested and lay it all out. Then I send it to the printer. Over several minutes and with many "Drrrr/ekekeke" sounds (text provided by my *Pixel Addict* colleagues!), the result is slowly churned out on paper fed by the tractor feed from a box under the desk. I think I got an A for my efforts, thanks Amiga/printer!

Whether it was graphics/desktop publishing or word processing, chances are many of you reading this had a similar setup in your bedroom or school. The computer could have been an Amiga, an Atari ST, a PC or something else. Dot matrix printers could work with many computers in 1992. You may even have had



This print head has a moving ribbon cartridge, others had a static cartridge, but which was better?

an inkjet or laser printer, but dot matrix printers were the cheapest option at the time. Many also came with built-in *Epson emulation* allowing the use of commonly available Epson drivers instead of having to track down specific drivers for each printer/computer combination.

Sadly my original Panasonic has long since disappeared, but I picked up a replacement a couple of years ago from eBay for £10. I was determined to get it working on my modern Windows 10 laptop to print things like postage labels etc. A couple of USB to parallel adapters later and much fiddling and I got it going! Sadly however, it turns out that modern things like QR codes and even barcodes are too much for my aged machine's limited resolution, so the postage label plan has been abandoned. But why did I want to use it in the first place?

I don't know about you, but I find modern printers to be infuriating machines. They seem to spend forever whirring and beeping after you switch them on before you are finally permitted to send them any work. Then, and only then, do they tell you they are out of a particular colour ink. Which you must replace with a genuine, overpriced cartridge from the original manufacturer before they will proceed. Even more aggravatingly, want to print a black and white document but one of the colour cartridges is out? You must replace the colour cartridge first. I mean...why? Replace the cartridge, print the document, and the resultant fuzzy mess shows you that an infrequently used inkjet will usually require a print head clean before trying again. Office laser printers fare only a little better, rarely refusing to print, but often ending up mangling paper somewhere in its journey through their complicated innards of heaters and rollers. Maybe it's rose-tinted spectacles, but I seem to remember that dot matrix printers always *just worked*.



My old Panasonic printer. Chunky but reliable.



Choose your quality.

As the name suggests, dot matrix printers create the desired output using a set of pins to print dots on the page, the dots forming letters and images. The print head holds the pins, the pins striking the paper through an inked ribbon. The two types available back then were 9-pin and 24-pin, with the 24-pin providing higher (near inkjet) quality due to the higher resolution provided. Printers were available in both black and white and colour formats. Adverts from 1992 give a price range of £135 for a 9-pin B&W up to £299 or more for a colour 24-pin. Popular brands were Citizen (you may remember the 120D from your school days), Star, Epson and Panasonic.

Dot matrix printers could produce varied resolutions, but usually offered *draft* or *near letter quality* (NLQ) modes and included their own fonts. They were noisy and slow, but at the time were the best value option. Thankfully the common use of a tractor paper feed meant that they could be left to it while you did something else, assuming you could block out the noise that is! Inkjets were on the scene too by then, but were more expensive.

Let's have a look at some of the popular dot matrix printers of 1992. *Amiga Format* issue 39 handily has provided us with some descriptions and specifications.



Citizen Swift 9/9x

This printer was Citizen's attempt to take on the dominance of the Star brand in the 9-pin dot matrix market. Back then, speeds included measurements of *characters per second* (cps), and the Swift 9/9x series provided 40cps in NLQ mode all the way up to 160cps in draft mode. It wasn't the cheapest printer on the market at £280, but it was well rated by *AF* at 84% with printed fonts being described as "smoother and more well defined than the competition".

Citizen are still around today, producing kiosk, photo and label printers.

Epson LX400

Still a well-known brand in the home and office today, Epson printers were very popular in the 1980s and 1990s and the LX400 9-pin was also reviewed by *AF*. Slower than the Citizen at only 25cps in NLQ, it wasn't far off at 150cps in draft mode. A solid choice but *AF* didn't really rate it, giving it a score of just 50%. The printer was a pretty ugly boxy affair too, in my humble opinion much like many Epson printers today. Admittedly, how do you make a printer pretty? At £199, it wasn't the cheapest either.



Star LC20

A popular brand back in the day, the 9-pin Star retailed for £235. Speed wasn't bad with 37.5cps at NLQ and 150cps in draft. Included were a decent range of fonts too. The shine was coming off this printer range though, with the expense, problems with the paper feed (still a problem with printers today!) and *AF* describing it as "no longer the showstopper it used to be". A rating of 65% was duly awarded.



Star remains as a brand today, but they appear to have moved out of the home market into POS systems.

That's some of the 9-pins, let's take a look at a 24-pin option.

Star LC24-20

A reasonably cheap choice at £305, printing speeds were higher than its 9-pin little brother at 53/160cps in NLQ/Draft mode respectively. More fonts were also included. An extra little ace up its sleeve was the inclusion of an LCD screen to help navigate the fonts and options. Commonplace now of course, an LCD screen was an unusual feature at the cheaper end of the market. Impressed by the price to performance ratio, *Amiga Format* awarded the LC24-20 a score of 85%.



I guess the question I've been asking myself is, "Can dot matrix printers still be relevant today?" In a world where modern printers are far too smart (and obstinate) for their own good, I was hoping to use my old Panasonic printer for a simpler life. Alas, as mentioned above, that dream was not to be. I'll be honest, getting hold of drivers/cables that actually work with such old tech on your modern PC is the devil's own job, but thankfully due to the Epson compatibility, it is sometimes possible to find a successful combination. Resolutions sadly cannot keep up with today's printing requirements, but hey, it was a fun ride!



A distinctive Silcia Shop advert for printers, which to choose?

PIXEL POWER!

- A visit to The Pixel Bunker in Milton Keynes

As I write this, British Summer has been... meh, and my three children have been off school for a fortnight.

Last week the family and I went ten-pin bowling, followed by feeding barrow-loads of pound coins into games which give you little sense of achievement or skill. Finally, your tickets are swapped for a couple of packets of sweets and a slinky which, an hour later, has been tangled up following the kids arguing over it!

Does Anything Beat Sunday Shopping?

This Sunday, my wife decided we'd go to Milton Keynes which didn't enthuse me much because it is, well... shopping. She'd actually decided to take us to Pho (for Vietnamese noodle soups) which had just opened.

We began our walk back to the car passing Lloyds bank, and the ever enticing National Film and Sci-Fi Museum / Pixel Bunker retro arcade on the left. It is somewhere I have passed countless times and hoped to go one day. Anyway, there I was trundling along talking to my son Austin when my wife, to my confusion, veered off left into the building; and she'd pre-booked!

Take Me To Heaven!

The lobby itself already had me grinning, with models of the Enterprise NCC1701-D and a Stormtrooper amongst lots more eye candy.



The arcade is calm at closing time. Who wouldn't want to accidentally get locked in here overnight?

The staff were welcoming, and after validating our tickets we entered a dimly lit room. Before us were rows of glowing screens in old arcade cabinets, people hunched over many of them, their faces ghostly white with the CRT glare reflecting off untanned skin.

With only three hours I was left somewhat overwhelmed as I tried to figure out where to start!

Drink It In

I really wanted to savour this experience, and for the first five or ten minutes I wandered around the room. This actually was time well spent as I got to know where the games were, and

acclimatised my mind to the 1980s and proper arcade games.

I won't list all the machines there, and I believe they change them every now and then too; but my 11 year old son Austin and I were immediately drawn to see what *Dig Dug* was like to play because of our shared love of *Stranger Things*. Handily next to it was a driving game which was definitely my favourite of the day (one I'd not seen before) Nintendo's *Cruisin'*: totally a product of an era when computer games were aimed at boys only: games featuring women in bikinis were plentiful back then.

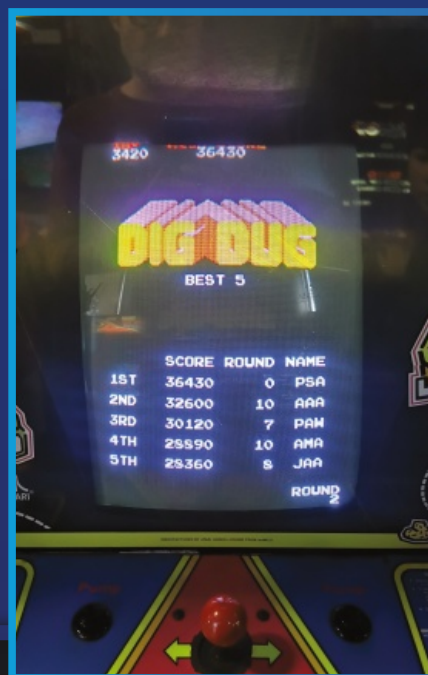
I recognised most of the games from



I still managed a thumbs up after three hours of button mashing.



Two Italian plumbers apparently make a fun game.



AMA (Austin) fought hard for 4th place!



Eleven year old trying to beat MADMAX's high score from Stranger Things!

playing them on my Atari ST in the 1980s, as arcades were only a rare treat on holidays at the seaside.

Value For Money

Playing arcade games with the real controls requires a different skill; and some of the games took me a couple of tries to even work out what you needed to do. The great thing is though, you pay for your entry ticket and all the machines are free to play so this was not a problem.

1980s arcade games draw you in with playability and simplicity and then empty your heart of hope just as you think you have the hang of it when you mistime something slightly! I kept thinking: "okay, one more go, I'll crack it!"

Feeling Like A Kid Again

The feeling you get here is like: remembering when Santa was real, remembering the adrenaline you had when you were riding your Raleigh Chopper down a really steep hill, the sensation in your ears of the multitude of sounds all competing for your brain time, the concentration and the frustration of just missing that checkpoint, it's all that and more! These games get your blood circulating better than any cardio session. Your palms get hot and sweaty, your heart hits your rib-cage, your grip slips on the controls and the games give their best shot at inducing RSI.

Younger readers: if you have only experienced modern arcades, older games allow for skill. Your money will



Look above the machines to see all sorts of themed adornments.

last as long as your talent; in complete contrast to modern machines. In my teens, I completed *Continental Circus* and my 50p attracted a crowd. I sat there winning race after race until I had taken that yellow F1 Lotus to the last chequered flag; it took possibly an hour! Some earlier 1980s games will last until you fall asleep!

Time Goes Too Fast

At the midway point, I stepped back into the lobby to cool down, speak to the staff, and have a little sit down; my ageing back was not happy with me standing at all these games.

Ten minutes before closing time and the lights come on and I see the room in a different way; a sense of calm reflection washed over me similar to the feeling in

a nightclub when the music stops.

Austin (AMA) had proudly cracked 4th on *Dig Dug*! We had a lengthy discussion about the experience while waiting for the rest of the family by the car (my wife and other kids don't share our love for gaming and went shopping).

I really rate this place, it's well maintained, has friendly staff, and they limit numbers so you don't queue. It's terrific value for money and lots of fun. I urge you to visit if you are in the area. See thepixelbunker.com for more information.



Glowing Intensity during playtime!



A whole host of 80s toys and memorabilia add interest to the place.

FROM BOARD GAME TO SCREEN

- The best Games Workshop video games of the 1990s

I became a Warhammer fan through the video games which I dipped my toes into during my childhood in the 1990s. Back then it wasn't like it is today where it seems like a new Warhammer game was getting released every few months. Most of the games released were of good quality and sucked you into the Warhammer environment. I've played these titles recently and compiled a list in a chronological order. Each of them still has a powerful appeal to me and I think they will resonate with you as well.

So, slam a clip into your bolter and get ready to face some Xeno scum as we battle through derelict space hulks and desolate alien environments.

In the future there is only war...

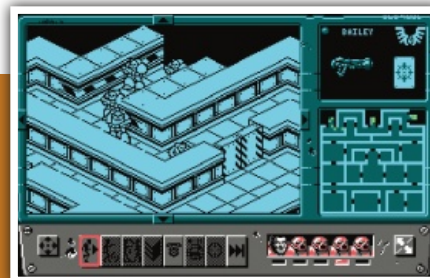
SPACE CRUSADE - 1992

Available on: Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64, Amstrad, Spectrum and DOS

I have lasting memories of playing the *Space Crusade* demo on the cover tape of issue 78 of *Amstrad Action*. The cover of the magazine had a Space Marine captain blasting the hell out of demonic looking aliens, so I was pumped when I booted the game up. It took me a while to understand the aim of the game and how to control my team. After a few minutes of turn-based gameplay, I encountered my first enemy, a gun toting Gretchin. These creatures are the foot soldiers of the game and in my mind were

space goblins. After positioning my troops, I selected the fire command which began the dice roll. These moments were always tense as even a well-armed Space Marine could fall foul of bad luck. As I moved through the corridors, I felt an increasing sense of dread manifest. Each turn I would nervously click the icon which controlled my scanner. When I heard the resounding ping return, an icy chill would grip my heart. The small blips on the radar could be anything from Chaos Marines or even a Dreadnought (which always reminded me of ED-209).

The graphics are excellent, you can choose to play the game from a top



The 3D graphics mode really helped set the tone and feel for the game.

down 2D angle or go full 3D and see the xeno's ugly mugs up close. The game featured a great mix of tension and strategic action. I can fondly remember the nights where my face was bathed in the warm glow of my CRT monitor as the hours passed by. I needed to just have *one more go*.

SPACE HULK - 1993

Available on: MS-DOS, Amiga, PC-98

Space Hulk was like a massive punch to your stomach. It's a title which drips with darkness and fear, it's an atmospheric strategic FPS. You control a team of Terminators facing a horde of

Genestealers who have taken up residence on an empty space ship. It was a form of spiritual successor to *Space Crusade* and contained a lot more features. You control your group of Marines from a first-person perspective and can equip them with variations of 12

different weapons. Using overhead maps, the player orders their squads into position. It's an interesting idea but *Space Hulk* is an incredibly challenging game and its overwhelming difficulty ruined the experience slightly for me. However, there was a sequel...

SPACE HULK: VENGEANCE OF THE BLOOD ANGELS - 1995



Seriously, haven't you ever heard of personal space!

Available on: PC, PlayStation, Sega Saturn

This is more like it! I remember getting this game on the PlayStation and finding it instantly more playable than its predecessor. It was more of a classic FPS but still contained the strategic elements which kept me coming back to the previous title. It's still a difficult game and one mistake can mean the

death of your squad at the claws of the Genestealers but it's not impossible. There's a powerful feeling of satisfaction as you complete your mission. I remember the kudos from my mates at school as I regaled them with tales of narrowly defeating the most terrifying aliens in the universe with only one Terminator Marine left. This is one of the most inventive and intense Warhammer 40K games of this era.

SHADOW OF THE HORNERD RAT - 1995

Available on: PC, PlayStation, Sega Saturn

But what about the Warhammer fantasy titles? Well now we move onto one of the first games I played on the PC. *Shadow of the Horned Rat* was a game I completely

fell in love with. It follows the adventures of a mercenary company through the old world of Warhammer. It's peppered with famous Warhammer fantasy locations such as the Border Princes and Loren. Taking control of Commander Morgan

Bernhardt and his Grudgebringers you must stop the Skaven from destroying the realms of men.

What this really means is that you will engage in a lot of real-time battles with



Commanding your mercenary legion was intuitive and fun.

your army against the greenskins (Orcs and Goblins) and the Skaven (a humanoid rat race). The battles are tough and you need to strategise and find a tactic that works while also minimising casualties. There is permanent death in this game, if a unit is wiped out, it isn't coming back!

When not battling in the campaign, you need to manage your company of heroes from your caravan. This section is all about hiring troops and replacing casualties. At

some points you can also choose your next mission. The game is linear but there are occasional branches from the main story.

This is a fun game which shows the potential of real time strategy in the fantasy universe. Like X-COM the permadeath feature makes you care about your men. You can pick this one up on GOG now, this release features a fix for a game breaking bug which shipped with the original title.

WARHAMMER: DARK OMEN - 1998

Available on: PC, PlayStation, Sega Saturn

There was also a sequel to *SOTHR* in *Dark Omen*. Everything about this title is slightly improved, including battles and graphics. It continues to follow the adventures of the Grudebringer Mercenary Company but focuses more on fighting the undead.

There were some great aesthetic touch-ups with this sequel including the 3D animated facial portraits which represent

the different regiments. Wounded commanders appear bloodied and scarred and when a regiment is destroyed you will see a close-up of its leader as he screams and dies. Once again, it's a tough game but you will feel rewarded as you play it. I had this title on the PlayStation and I found that issuing commands from the controller was intuitive. It didn't have the same impact on me as its predecessor but it did keep me playing through some cold winter nights!



An engaging sequel - now with even more death!

FINAL LIBERATION - 1997

Available on: PC

Back to the futuristic battles of Warhammer 40k with *Final Liberation*. The premise of this title is that an imperial world has been conquered by Orks and you must reclaim it. This is a familiar beginning to many Warhammer game plots but is told through some engaging (and at times ridiculous) live-

action FMV sequences. The battles are hex turn-based combat, it's important to carefully consider which units to use and which type of enemy to use them against. There's an incredible variety in unit types and you can consider which area you wish to attack next by using the campaign map.

I haven't spent a lot of time with this but

it ranks up with some of the best turn-based strategy titles I have played. You can grab it now from GOG.

Here ends my whistle-stop tour of Warhammer titles from the 1990s. There's a hell of a lot of variety here and... wait a moment. There's one missing isn't there? How could I forget my favourite Warhammer based game of all time?

HERO QUEST

Available on: Amiga, PC, Spectrum, Amstrad, Commodore 64, Atari ST

Now I know there will be a few of you out there who don't agree that this is strictly a Warhammer title. I, perhaps contentiously, say that it is. At any rate, this was our gateway drug into the Games Workshop universe and it was more addictive than heroin.

I had the Amiga version and it opened with a beautiful introduction which sets the scene and story, from here the game offers you the choice of up to four playable characters. This is in the form of the classic fantasy tropes such as Elf, Barbarian, Wizard and Dwarf. Each of these had their own strengths and weaknesses

outlined in the vital stats. Select your player and then the game begins.

You are led through a series of dungeons with various mission objectives. You must stop the evil Morcar and his minions from taking over the world and each level has its own flavour and difficulty. The atmosphere drips from the detailed graphics and haunting music score. The turn-based nature of the game gives an almost perfect pace to the gameplay. The controls and interface are easy to get the hang of, movement is dictated by an on-screen spinning coin which lands on a number when the mouse is clicked.

This is, without a doubt, one of the best adaptations of a Games Workshop board

game ever released. It received critical praise at the time and spawned a sequel - *Hero Quest II: Legacy of Sorasil*.

This is a true classic on the Amiga and with its inclusion on this list, my task is finally complete.

Onward, to victory!



Morcar looks on as our brave barbarian tackles another evil swine from the depths of hell!

THE AMSTRAD NC100

- Can an early slate computer compete with the PCs of the time?

Some combinations are timeless: Fish and Chips, Chicken and Parmo (with the best from Linthorpe Road in Middlesbrough), and Lord Alan Sugar and the Z80. Truly a stone cold classic combo and the only one actually relevant to this fine publication! From the original CPC 464 to the custom ASIC in the PCW16, the venerable Z80 was Amstrad's go-to non-DOS processor, and it seems only right that when the company launched what it described as "The world's easiest to use computer", the good old Zilog was front and centre.

When this slate computer launched in 1992, if you had a PC you'd need at least a little familiarity with DOS to get anything done, even if it had a custom GUI bolted on top (as in the case of Amstrad's 5286 Family Pack). Other formats had it better

to varying degrees, but in general, computer owners faced a decent level of complexity and a steep learning curve. These days, I call that *experience* Windows 11...

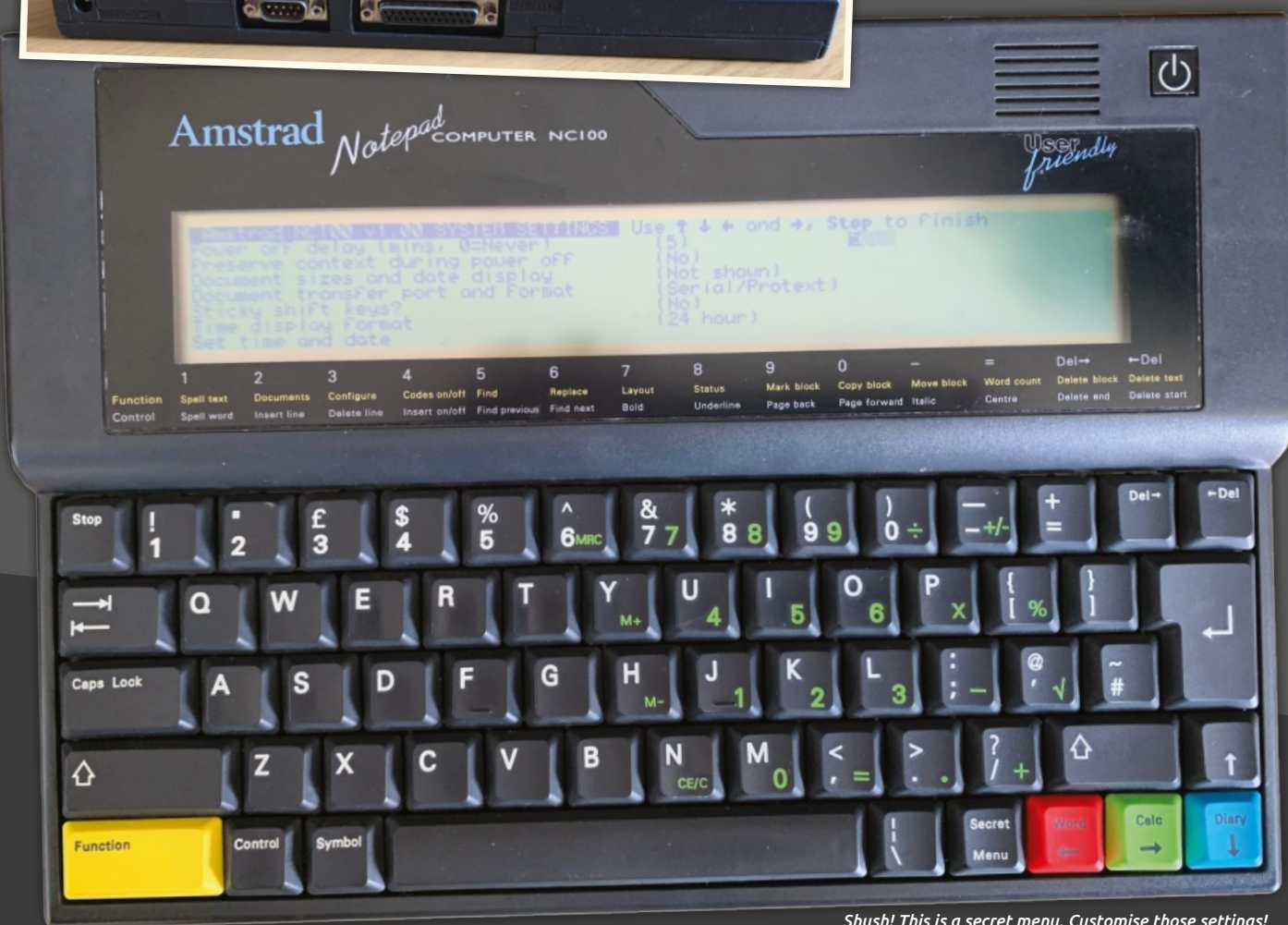
The NC100 was Amstrad's attempt at putting a computer in front of everyone who was scared off by the complexities of the PC, as well as those who didn't want to pawn an internal organ for a Mac - I jest slightly, as clearance prices for the aged Mac Classic were under £500 by then, but a decent spec still cost at least £1,000. And what if you wanted portability? Measuring 297x210x27mm at its thickest, the NC100 has the footprint of a piece of A4 paper and weighs in at exactly 1kg. Build quality is okay - the plastic can creak a bit but it doesn't feel fragile. Four AA batteries offer 40 hours of use and there is decent connectivity, with

industry standard parallel and serial ports, as well as a PCMCIA type 1 slot for up to 1MB capacity cards. There is 64KB of user memory, backed up by a two year lifespan lithium coin cell battery, a built-in speaker and real time clock. That Z80 powers through the apps built into the 256KB ROM at a reasonable 4MHz, and all told it's quite the tasty little package, especially at the launch price of £199.

The 64-key keyboard is, in my humble opinion the best to grace a machine of this form factor. Ever. Keep your Z88, tidy away your Alphasmart, and (gently) put down that Epson HX10 - the NC100 is miles ahead of any of those. With even spacing and reasonable feedback from the keys, only the cursor key placement annoys, but that's the sole compromise I feel it makes. Typing on the NC100 is a joy and a pleasure.

However, what good is a sublime keyboard without good software, and it's here that the purpose of the NC100 becomes clear. Using a combination of those four colourful keys, you gain

Amstrad's PSP - Power, Serial and Parallel.



Shush! This is a secret menu. Customise those settings!



Yep, it might be hard to see but this article was written in part on the NC100.



The main menu - how simple can you make it?

access to the software suite built into the ROM. Yellow is your command key, and used in conjunction with Red, Green and Blue, launches the word processor, calculator and diary/clock/address book functions respectively.

The word processor, a development of *Protext*, features a decent array of formatting features, find and replace, and a 48,000 word spell-checker. Documents can be saved to a suitable PCMCIA memory card, and you can print directly to IBM and Epson 9 and 24-pin dot matrix printers, a Canon BJ10e inkjet or a Hewlett Packard LaserJet. The cost of the latter vastly exceeded the price of the NC100 at launch and good luck finding any of these compatible printers still working today!

The calculator is good enough for your basic needs, whilst the organiser features are alright but would be put to shame by the contemporary Psion Series 3. As a bonus, you also get access to BBC BASIC for all of your programming needs (on a Z80 portable anyway), and much like the aforementioned Psion, it's handy to have the ability to develop your own software or type in suitable lists if needed. There's also a shortcut guide below the display, and the handy *secret menu* key gives you access to system settings.

However, all is not perfect in the world of the NC100, and there are a couple of flaws. The first is the most serious - the

screen. It's an 80 column, 8 line 480x64 LCD that isn't backlit, meaning some ambient light is mandatory. In the most advantageous of situations it just about passes muster, but in any other, it's a terrible display. It does help massively with the battery life, and you could argue it does the job it needs to, but time has not been kind. Fortunately, two legs on the base raise the rear of the device, permitting a slightly better viewing angle than it would be otherwise when used on a flat surface. The second flaw is the connectivity: the only way to get data off the machine is via a serial or parallel cable. You can still do that these days, and there are a couple of online guides describing the process, but it is a handy reminder that whilst the aim here was for an easy to use machine, the computing ecosystem of the time really did require some fiddling about with correct cables, baud settings and the like.

But is it *actually* easy to use? The manual claims so, as the introduction has Lord Sugar stating that he wrote the first chapter on it. Whether he did or not, the NC100 fulfils the brief. The combination of hot keys, straightforward menu structure and relatively low number of features means that the NC100 is a computer that is easy to pick up and master. Even today, it can be a useful tool, if lacking the user comforts that USB would bring to the connectivity party as the 1990s progressed.

There were two other models in the NC range - 1993s NC200 took the concept to the clamshell form factor, much like early DOS portables of the late 1980s. This provided for a bigger, backlit screen, packing in 80 columns with 16 rows - huzzah! There was also a built-in 3.5" floppy drive for MS-DOS compatible disks, double the RAM, three simple games and even a spreadsheet with database functionality. Of course, the price went up too, coming in at £329, as did the power requirements. Five C cells were required, yet they were not quite enough to keep the floppy drive going once their charge started depleting. The NC150, sold primarily in Italy and France, took the original slate format and added some of the 200's software features.

It is easy to mock the NC100 now for its poor screen and antiquated connectivity, but for what it offered for the price, it was (and still is) a fantastic device. There is little to compare the NC100 with in today's market, aside from the (yet to be released at the time of writing) Freewrite Alpha, but at north of £300 that's expensive and offers little functionality beyond mimicking a typewriter.

Is there a market for a modern day NC100 replacement? Probably not. But there is a part of me that wishes it so, if only to see what a combination of a decent screen and *that* keyboard could achieve. Anyone fancy setting up a Kickstarter? 🐸



Crank that beep all the way to 11!



PCMCIA/JEDI, I mean JEIDA memory card slot.

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PIXEL DUST

INVOKING THE OLD GODS OF BITMAP ART

By Phil South

With the rise of computer gaming in the 1980s and 1990s, video game graphics introduced us to the idea of pixelated art. It wasn't an artistic choice, it was an expediency driven by the limitations of the technology. The screen resolution of computer displays was truly pathetic, giving new meaning to the word, with sometimes as little as 200 pixels of width to play with.

In those few dots on the screen heroes, villains, space battles were rendered, new worlds and

civilisations were painted perfectly by a handful of graphical geniuses who didn't understand the meaning of *can't be done*.

Working with what they had, which wasn't much, they also invented an enduring artform that persists even outside of gaming to this day. Phil South goes on another of his meandering memorial odysseys, assisted by interviews with some of the poor chaps who once upon a time had to make a silk purse out of Lego in the time it takes to boil a kettle. Over to you Phil...

Bitmap graphics and I go way back. In about 1981 my dear departed chum John Molloy got a new computer, so he gave me his old one, a Challenger CH1P, and two (count them) games. I knew BASIC from my college days in 1976-77 so I was keen to code my own games from the get go, but I had to wait many years for computer technology to be able to deal with the ideas I had.

My first proper hack on the CH1P was learning how to change the character map to make my own character graphics. That's how it was done back then, as freeform bitmap graphics were by that point quite a few years away. If you wanted graphics on the screen you had to hack the character set into graphics by brute force and build up your characters and backgrounds letter by letter, like a wall of bricks. Of course you needed graph paper and a calculator to figure it all out, and it was tortuous work. You had to translate the lines of black and white grid spaces into 1's and 0's and then convert that to hexadecimal. There was no drawing directly onto the screen, so you had to make individual bricks into interesting shapes and bolt them together as alphanumeric strings. It was Lego, basically.

This methodology carried on when computers became more mainstream. The Sinclair Spectrum had space in the operating system to create user defined characters, and ways in which you could build sprites, even change the character set into an entirely new font. My first bit of what I'd call *art* with a capital F was a

program *Abstract #1*, a randomised art piece in ZX BASIC. The user defined characters were assigned random 0's and 1's and the foreground and background colour were set randomly. The entire screen was then filled so the screen could be printed (presumably on the colour printers which didn't exist yet). Each time you pressed the key it re-ran the program giving you a whole new look. With 16x16 combinations you had 256 different colourways, some more pleasing than others. Of course the pixels were always random, but you detected shapes inside the noise, as the brain always seeks patterns even if there are none. But I digress. As with most other computers

of the time having only two colours per character placed severe limitations on the amount of detail and character you could imbue your graphics with.

On the Commodore 64 they had a set of predefined graphics character building blocks on the keyboard, which took care of all your basic screen decorations, right angles, squares, triangles and circles, plus quarter circles etc. These were used to frame and lay out text, and make boxes and lines in all directions on screen. But apart from its built-in graphics blocks, the C64's big win was sprites with more colours. This meant you could do something which was difficult on the ZX ▶



Credit to Dan Whitehead.

Phil's original Speccy as used in the Your Sinclair offices.



Credit to Dan Whitehead.

Just in case anyone tried nicking it?

Spectrum, you could add more colour and therefore more character.

Once gaming really got going, graphics creation tools improved vastly, and for me the biggy was *Melbourne Draw*. This was in truth my first taste of proper computer art, because instead of planning out every pixel in advance, you could now just play around directly on the screen, or *draw* as we call it. Sketching artwork live on the bitmap screen became easier, and you could see what worked on screen rather than assuming it would work ahead of time. Also the pleasing fuzz of CRT screens covered a multitude of sins.

But outside of my trainspotting speccy world the mouse had arrived on the Mac, with much trumpet tooting and Ridley Scott directed videos. This ushered in the era of graphics input devices in a big bad way. There was a mouse on the Speccy very briefly but it never became mainstream. Most people didn't see the point of it, but personally I was really gagging for more control over pixels. My experiments on the Mac (working as I was in the same office as *Mac User* magazine) taught me the gestalt of 1-bit graphics, either black or white. You could imply detail that wasn't there with careful toggling of individual pixels. You

could imply a shine on an edge with just one single white pixel. It was like some kind of eldritch conjuring trick.

Once the mouse became a mainstream input device later on with the advent of the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST, the pickup of graphics programs and means of production became much more democratised. Anyone could learn how to shuffle pixels into art and the price of entry, while still quite high, was beginning to make it affordable to non-professionals. *Deluxe Paint* was my weapon of choice and it was then I started painting and doing real art on computers. The paradigm and tools of *DPaint* would live on, copied in *Photoshop* and just about any other graphics program that called itself one. But pixel art began to die off once *Photoshop* came along. There were just... too many colours.

Once the colour palettes became huge and you could literally paint in any colour, things began to change. You didn't have to have sharp edges on your sprites, you could soften them with subtle shades of the same colour, making the jagged or *aliased* edge of the graphics *anti-aliased*. Now everyone wanted graphics that were smoooooth.

This rise in resolution and palette sizes

inspired the Amiga and ST gaming revolution and everything that entailed, like 3D and millions of colours, which went on to make the 16-bit era the most colourful yet. Eventually (as covered in previous issues), even the PC caught up with EGA and XGA and we arrived at the modern age in computer art with a rainbow splat.

Exemplars Of The Form

In my world until now, the games which exemplified class in pixel graphics were of course the Speccy games, and getting good characters and animation on a Speccy was a true test of guts. If you could make it there you could make it anywhere, as Frank Sinatra once wisely intoned. But the heroes of ZX Spectrum graphics really flew when there was more colour and pixel real estate to play with. People who'd struggled with Spectrum 16 colour and VGA embraced the new psychedelic cornucopia of colour and space warmly. Now you didn't have to struggle, all you had to do was throw everything but the kitchen sink into it and all would be well.

Like you, I remember fondly the first times I ever gasped at pixels on a screen. Games like *King's Quest* and *Space Quest* from Sierra On-Line, and the Lucasfilm Games, especially *Indiana Jones* and *Monkey Island*. Real characters full of life and engaging animation. Surely it was only a matter of time before computer games



A manual always comes in handy for programs such as this.

...PIXEL ART BEGAN TO DIE OFF ONCE PHOTOSHOP CAME ALONG. THERE WERE JUST... TOO MANY COLOURS."

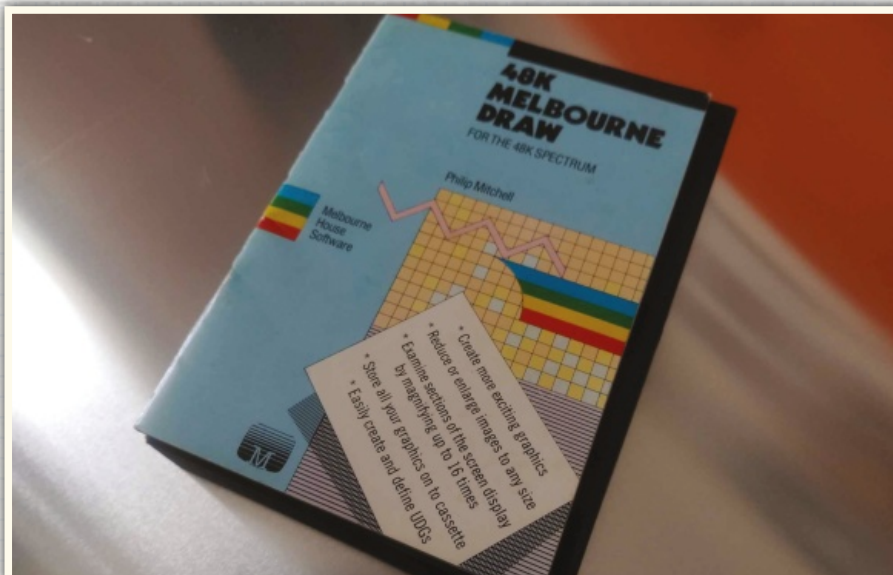
were just like animated cartoons or even (gasp) movies? I doubted such riches would even be possible, but of course I hoped, damn fool idealist that I was.

Of course the graphics became better and better with time, more colours, more resolution, well... more everything. Although in certain areas games pushed the tech to deliver photographic realism, like when almost all games had to have full motion video, there were some who stayed true to the form. Games were supposed to be drawn, they said, and the best use of the chips and processor speed was pixel graphics.

Very soon the gaming world got very flashy and full colour and 3D, computer graphics became just graphics, in the same way as in China it's not chinese food, it's just food.

Back To The Future

Flash forward to the modern age of gaming and while one branch of gaming forged ahead and made everything more photoreal and real 3D, another fork hung back and stayed with the pixel graphics. Partly this was fuelled by nostalgia for the bitmap games of yore, where gameplay had to be strong to cover for the lack of graphics. And partly it was the knowledge that less is more and making your pixels work harder was easy on resources and made for better, more immersive games. Theatre of the Mind.



Melbourne Draw was the package which started Phil on the path to graphical design.

WHEN BEDROOM DEVELOPERS COULD RE-ENTER THE FRAY ON THE SAME LEVEL AS BIG SOFTWARE HOUSES

The main bitmap pixel graphics resurgence came when Steam became the most popular gaming platform of choice. When bedroom developers could re-enter the fray on the same level as big software houses, the pixel graphics *back to basics* aesthetic reigned supreme. *Fez*, and other pixelated puzzle adventures, took the world by storm, echoing a time when pixels ruled the earth.

Even now games like *Cloudpunk* and *Virtuaverse* hark back to a time when the limited resolution and colour palettes gave you space to dream, and the best graphics card was the one between your ears.

Pixels As Art

As well as the comeback of pixel art in games, pixel art spun off into the fine art world with groups like eBoy. eBoy is a pixel art group founded in 1997 by artists Kai Vermehr, Steffen Sauerteig and Svend Smital. Their incredible large panoramas in the style of a *SimCity* game or a *Command and Conquer* style strategy game were rendered with peerless levels of detail and deliciously delicate pastel colour palettes. Tasteful art pieces which took bitmap art to its inevitable conclusion.

Although Vermehr grew up in South

America absorbed by the popular culture of the West, including video games, Sauerteig and Smital grew up in East Germany where there were no computer games, and definitely no tradition of pixel art. They embraced this culture that they missed out on (in the way Eastern Bloc people did, once they escaped the Bloc) and reinterpreted it in their own ways.

Eventually the group grew to worldwide fame, working with brands like Adidas, Adobe, Nike, Honda, Paul Smith, Louis Vuitton, DKNY, and Kidrobot, and their art was spun out into t-shirts and posters and even gallery exhibitions. Not only was pixel art real art now, it was now properly mainstream too.

The Future

Is there a future for pixel art? Well of course there is. The whole point of pixel art is that it staunchly refused to grow up or develop despite really heavy encouragement that it should shrivel up and die, and for very good reasons. There's no way it can expand what's possible (with next gen bitmap graphics or resources) because the whole point is that it mimics a time before resources were even available, before computers were an all-you-can-eat buffet of clock cycles, with the expectation of beefy graphics ▶

processors and miles of screen real estate.

They will stay the same, but I suspect people will just (as they have in the past) get better and better at rendering things with fewer pixels. That's no bad thing; nothing creates fertile artistic arenas like restriction. But also perhaps people will get better at appreciating artists who can render subjects in this incredibly restrictive and challenging form. Compression is an artform in itself, like poetry and children's stories, where less is more and every word must count for something. In pixel art, every dot is sacred.

It's a black art, akin to magic, with exponents having more in common with surrealist draughtsmen like Salvador Dali than landscape painters. Dali once famously rendered a picture of his deceased brother in droplets of blood, mimicking the halftone dot grid pattern of newsprint. And so it is with pixel art. They are art mages, wizards of digital paint, who can make a storm out of a teacup and in 4KB of RAM. We have become so used to having infinite resources, but climate change and soaring energy prices are teaching us that in the future we must be frugal. Being a compression ninja is a future life skill which will be highly prized.

Once everyone who can remember the first wave of computer games is gone, I can only hope that pixel art is once again elevated and revered into the future, like oil paintings from centuries past. The pixel gods belong with the greats, because through hard work and mad skillz they make the impossible look simple.

21 IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS

WITH SHAUN MCCLORE AND SIMON BUTLER

In the spirit of the Colbert Questionert (where after answering the questions on the test you are "known") we tasked two of the old pixel gods, Simon Butler and Shaun McClure, with answering 20 of our very impertinentest. To their credit they took us seriously and didn't look down their noses even once.



SHAUN MCCLORE

An industry celebrated safe-pair-of-hands, Shaun is responsible for *Double Dragon 3*, *Road Rash*, *Raiden*, *Actua Soccer*, *Premier Manager*, *Postman Pat*, and *Count Duckula*

among many others. In later life he has reinvented himself as an author of books about computer games, popular culture, movie miniatures and popular music. Check out his author page on Amazon for more details: www.pixel.addict.media/ShawnMcClure

What would you say makes you good at pixel art?

Pixel art is one of those things where you either know how to do it or not, and it took me a very long time to know how to do it properly. You have to be able to control it and be able to define what you are drawing, often in very low resolutions. You also need to know when to not put in too much detail, as less is often more.

What makes you unique?

Dunno if I am! I will take the time to try and do something right, and I can often balance

this by being generally faster than most people due to my experience. I can't draw horses or bicycles to save my life though.

What inspires you and how do you stay motivated?

Money, and I generally motivate myself by realising how much work I have to do to get paid. People are often waiting for it too, so you have to keep yourself going and not let anyone down.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be an illustrator, but on paper. I was also into the idea of becoming a painter. This was before home computers. I was really into the *Fighting Fantasy* books, and loved the artwork. I used to buy *White Dwarf* magazine – and pore over the pictures of dragons and warriors. Then I got a ZX81 and started to fiddle with art on that, using the graphics that were built into the keyboard.

Who is your art role model?

Didn't really have one. There are a few illustrators that I admire. Tim White, Jim Burns, the classic sci-fi illustrators. Giger obviously, though a lot of his stuff is pretty crap in retrospect.

What's the most challenging job you've ever done?

The Game Gear version of *James Pond 2* was a nightmare. He could run in a complete circle like *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and so we had to duplicate all of the animations over 8 rotations. I had to cut him into little pieces and give a detailed list to the coders with pixel offset values just to get it all in.

How did you learn your skills?

Trial and error. The biggest challenge on the Spectrum was avoiding its famous colour clash. *Melbourne Draw* had a grid overlay that you could turn on and off, and that was a godsend. Before this I had to actually draw



Now this is an excellent loading screen!



Excuse me, can you move so I can open the present?

things on graph paper and then copy to the screen.

How do you create depth and dimensionality?

Shadows are key here. You have to bear in mind what you create looks like from different angles and how tall it is. If you get the shadow wrong, it will be glaringly obvious.

What tools and software do you use?

I started with *Melbourne Draw*, and then used *Art Studio* on the Atari ST, then switched to *DPaint* for many decades. *Photoshop* is the only thing I use now.

How do you create backgrounds and how do you separate them from the foreground?

Everything is usually drawn in layers, so you can easily separate them out.

Do you use colour theory, or is your work more intuitive or driven by technical constraints?

Never really bothered, I just go with instinct and other factors. I tend to be

quite primary colour based and I have to make a conscious decision to dirty colours up a bit and turn the saturation down. I'm a proper kid of the 1980s for sure.

What role do references play in your process?

I usually have a good idea in mind, as I like to mull over something before I start it, and then I go looking for *inspiration* on the internet. I nearly always use a photo of something as you get much better detail than just imagining things (I find).

Were you ever a cartoonist or a fine artist?

I did a lot of oil painting as a nipper and fancied myself the darling of a new wave of modern artists. It almost actually happened, but then games came along and ruined everything.

Do you make user interface elements or do you never touch them?

Yes, well back in the prehistoric ages, one artist did everything. Now games have hundreds of artists and you get specialist UI designers. I've done a hell of a lot of this type of stuff, and a lot of things for non-games too, such as Medical Scanners and so on.

Is accessibility (readable to a broad audience, regardless of visual impairments or disabilities) ever an issue?

Things have to be clear for everyone to see, but due to technical limits you can't usually do anything special. I once worked on a *Scrabble* game for UbiSoft and the main menu was in text. And UbiSoft asked us to turn it into icons "in case whoever is playing it cannot read" –

erm, it's *SCRABBLE* guys.

Are you better with teams or flying solo?

I much prefer solo. Otherwise you spend too much time negotiating with the rest of the team. I find I work faster too when other people aren't putting their oar in.

How do you balance the technical precision of pixel graphics with the need to create organic, fluid animation?

These days I often cheat and render things in 3D and then draw over them. Super handy for rotating things as well. Shadows can be too precise though when you do this and it looks artificial. Fine balance indeed.

How do you see the future of pixel art evolving in the future? Does it have a future?

People will always crave something that looks different. And it still has that retro appeal.

Name one thing you can't live without.

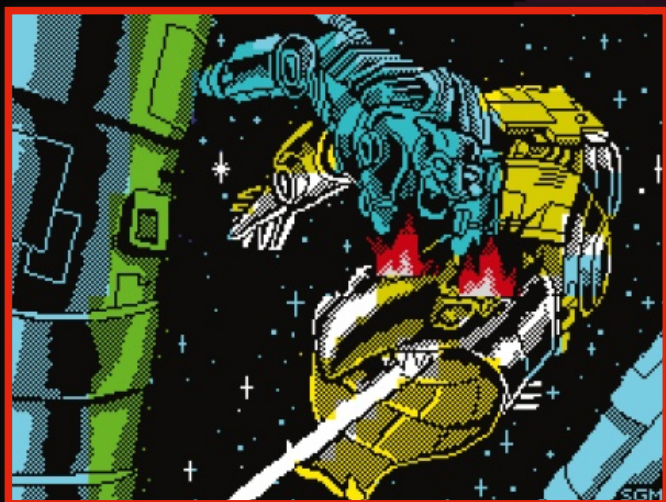
To quote Father Jack - Beer, Girls! (*Ed. - "That's 2 things!"*)

What's the best bit of pixel art you ever made and did it get the love you think it deserved?

Hard to say, *Scrabble* on GameBoy Color was brilliant. The comedian Richard Herring actually mentioned it in one of his books. He played it when eating at service stations between gigs.

What's your favourite colour?

Black.



Arcade conversions were often sold on graphical strength.



The 1980s are pretty much summed up here.

SIMON BUTLER

Self-described "Bafta nominated pixel pusher and game designer", Simon has worked in the games industry since 1983 and was the lead artist on in-game and marketing graphics on over 400 titles.



These days he's elevated pixels to fine art with his website Dinosaur Pie, which does portraits of pop culture icons which are entirely recognisable despite their faces being only 5 pixels. <https://dinosaurpie.co.uk/>

What would you say makes you good at pixel art?

I'm good at what I do and know my limitations, so I suppose that has helped somewhat. I must be reasonably good because I'm still playing my trade professionally 40 years on.

What makes you unique?

Probably the only thing that makes me stand out from any other industry pixel-monkey is the length of time that I've been here. I never expected this to even be my career and yet here I am.

What inspires you and how do you stay motivated?

The brutal truth to this is cold hard cash. But at this particular time in my career I find I'm able to be more discerning in the choice of projects as well as having

the chance to work on my own projects with like-minded developers.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Not old! Unfortunately that plan didn't work out. I did entertain ideas very early on of being a comic book artist but reading them was infinitely preferable.

Who is your art role model?

There are those whose work I admire, but mostly these are people who entered the pixel arena decades after me. There was no one to admire at the start of the industry because we were all learning our craft, and with the few exceptions of those I worked alongside, I knew no one else.

What's the most challenging job you've ever done?

Universal Monsters had its own particular challenges. It took a distinct turn from what I envisioned the moment that Universal Studios got involved, and from there it simply dragged on until it ran out of steam and died in its tracks. *Terraria Otherworld* was an interesting project to put it politely. I was called in to do pixels on a project that had been in development for over a year, but on my first day discovered that nothing had been done. That was fun.

How did you learn your skills?

On the job. It was as cut and dried as that. I was first hired by people who trusted my traditional art skills and I was taught on day one how to plot pixels.



The film licence - at times a frustrating experience.

After that you learned a little bit more with each editor on each project and applied your own methods to expand your skill set.

How do you create depth and dimensionality?

Things in the backgrounds are lighter than things in the foreground. You apply that rule if the palette allows. The use of shadows helps but in projects like *Monkey McGee* I made a rod for my own back by attempting to put shadows almost everywhere.

What tools and software do you use?

From the start of my career until I departed Ocean Software it was a continual change from one coder to another requiring you to use their sprite/tile editors. In Ocean, on my C64 work I used *ShortEd*, a wonderful tool created by the late Allan Short. Entering the 16-bit era I was introduced to *Degas* for the Atari ST and the incredible *Deluxe Paint*. Now I use *Pro Motion* and have done for the greater part of my career. It's all singing, all dancing and simply superb.

How do you create backgrounds and how do you separate them from the foreground?

With great difficulty. Unless you're lucky enough to be able to have bitmaps as the backgrounds, you're working with tiles and these, regardless of platform, are always limited. So you have to think about creating what is, in essence, a LEGO set that can be used in many different ways so that there is variety in what is behind the game action. Non-organic tiles are easiest, but the challenge is always interesting and that's part of the fun. Foreground graphics are done in a very similar manner, but simply set via code for the player to pass behind.

Do you use colour theory, or is your work more intuitive or driven by technical constraints?

I can only say that I have an idea of what



Over 30 years on and our Editor still struggles with this game.



Navy Seals was a great film to game conversion.



The Addams Family looks terrific on the Game Boy with amazing detail.

I want to create and I know what colours I want to use. These may change during the process but there is no *theory* behind it. You simply know that you can only have a set number of colours, and you work around that.

What role do references play in your process?

That depends on the project. Sometimes I will spend a day or so checking out existing titles to get ideas for environments, which always cause me the most headaches for some reason. Other times I know from the get-go exactly what I want to do and jump straight in.

Were you ever a cartoonist or a fine artist?

I think the word cartoonist describes my role in art better than most. The early days of the games industry didn't give you much chance to create realistic graphics, so I became known as a guy who could create cutesy sprites. I've dabbled with gouache and water colours,

but I'm a pixel monkey and proud.

Do you make user interface elements, or do you never touch them?

User Interfaces were simply one more part of game art and having come in on virtually day one of the industry so to speak, an artist did everything. There were no specialists. That came much later.

Is accessibility (readable to a broad audience, regardless of visual impairments or disabilities) ever an issue?

You always attempt to make your work as *readable* as possible. You want people to see your work and hopefully appreciate it, so you go out of your way to make things pop on screen.

Are you better with teams or flying solo?

The majority of the work I have done in the last 40 years has almost invariably been me working with a coder. I shan't lie, the

few exceptions to that rule have not always gone smoothly, but this usually comes from me working with people who have less experience. I prefer working solo. There are fewer headaches.

How do you balance the technical precision of pixel graphics with the need to create organic, fluid animation?

You pick up tricks along the way to fool the eye into seeing what isn't there, or making things look smoother than they actually are. This is part of the daily challenge regardless of how many times you've done it before.

How do you see the future of pixel art evolving in the future? Does it have a future?

I think I can say without any fear of contradiction that there are more pixel games now than ever existed in the *golden years* of the games industry. Every day something new appears that rocks me in my seat. These are amazingly creative, exciting, and truly innovative times.

Name one thing you can't live without.

My family.

What's the best bit of pixel art you ever made, and did it get the love you think it deserved?

There have been times when I have sat back and thought "job well done." But outside of that I rarely if ever created for the adulation from others. This was my job. I love what I do and as long as I feel that love then that's enough.

What's your favourite colour?

Blue.

Thank you Simon and Shaun, I'd say that you are now "known". 🌟



Low resolution screens can imply greater detail with clever use of colours and shading.

THE FUTURE WAS NOW

- The Saga of the SNK Neo Geo Pocket Color

As has been discussed in previous entries of this series, it is almost impossible to overstate Nintendo's dominance of the handheld gaming market in the 1990s. With nearly 120 million Game Boy and Game Boy Color systems sold and a massive catalogue of games, Nintendo enjoyed a near monopoly on handheld gaming. Of course, there *were* attempts to unseat the Game Boy from its throne.

Setting aside oddballs like the Tiger GameCom, there were three primary competitors which attempted to leverage more powerful hardware to capture market share from Nintendo's juggernaut:

- The Atari Lynx (1989), developed by a group including engineers who had previously developed the Commodore Amiga. The Lynx was the first handheld gaming system to include a full-colour LCD screen, and offered advanced capabilities like multiplayer support. Total Lynx sales: approximately 2 million units.
- NEC's TurboExpress (1990), which squeezed the internals of a TurboGrafx-16 home console into a brick-like handheld device. The TurboExpress sported numerous

advanced features including a backlit active-matrix colour display, full compatibility with TurboGrafx-16 home console games, and an optional TurboVision TV tuner. Total TurboExpress sales: approximately 1.5 million units.

- Sega's Game Gear (1990). Like others, the Game Gear tried to unseat the Game Boy by leveraging more advanced hardware, including a faster CPU, rich audio and a full-colour backlit LCD screen. Sega also had a powerful advantage over NEC and Atari: their popular Sonic the Hedgehog mascot, who appeared in 12 Game Gear titles. Total Game Gear sales: approximately 10.6 million units.

While the three systems outlined above offered hardware advantages over Nintendo's Game Boy, the most compelling differentiator was their inclusion of a full-colour display. Even Nintendo's most ardent fans often admitted that the low-contrast grayscale display of the original Game Boy was hard to see clearly even in optimal lighting conditions. With the Game Boy Color, Nintendo finally introduced a colour screen to the platform, but without any form of internal illumination, the Game Boy Color's display was still quite difficult to see.

Of course, Nintendo was very aware of their competitors, and knew that all three of them suffered from the same critical limitation: those backlit full-colour displays absolutely *devoured* batteries. An original Game Boy could run for up to 30 hours on a set of four AA batteries, and the Game Boy Color



The Neo Geo Pocket Color lists some key technical specifications in tiny, colour-matched text printed directly into the display bezel. Note that this text includes some unusual formatting and grammar, including the opening "NEOGEOPOCKET" without spacing.

could run for up to 10 hours on just two. By contrast, the Sega Game Gear, Atari Lynx and NEC Turbo Express would top out at 3-5 hours maximum on *six!* Sega, NEC and Atari all offered optional rechargeable battery packs, but these added significant cost and bulk to their handhelds which were already larger and more expensive than Nintendo's less power-hungry Game Boy handhelds. By the end of the 1990s, all three of these competing systems were either discontinued or rapidly fading, when a new competitor entered the handheld gaming market: SNK.

Founded in the early 1970s, the Shin Nihon Kikaku corporation saw considerable success with both a line of popular arcade games, and a number of well-received home console titles for the Nintendo Game Boy and Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). While their NES titles in particular were widely viewed as successes, SNK largely focused their late-80s efforts on enhancing their arcade games and hardware. Among their many innovations, SNK pioneered the development of multi-



The most common Neo Geo Pocket Color box style for North America was somewhat more sedate than the style used for Europe.



One of the primary and most memorable features of the Neo Geo Pocket Color is the 8-direction "clicky" joystick, which was ideally suited to arcade-style 2D fighting games.



After briefly showing the NEOGEO logo, the Neo Geo Pocket Color then displays its own logo at power-up.

By Huxley Dunsany

www.retroroadshow.org

@Huxley_D

www.youtube.com/TheRetroRoadshow



SNK vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash!

game arcade systems, allowing a single Neo Geo arcade cabinet to house as many as six distinct games on internal cartridges. These cabinets quickly proved successful with arcade owners who appreciated their increased flexibility (and thus increased profitability), and also with gamers who delighted in the exciting and technologically-advanced games SNK released for their arcade systems.

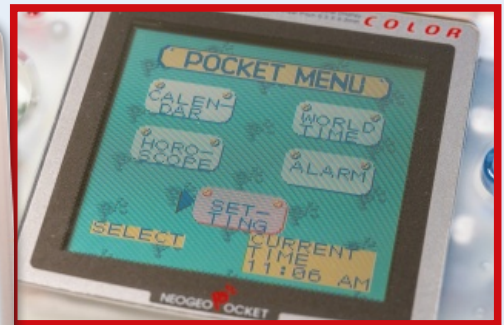
Throughout the 1990s, SNK's arcade machines earned a dedicated following amongst fans. SNK offered a range of excellent games across multiple genres, although they particularly excelled with 2D fighting and combat games. With franchises like *Art of Fighting*, *Fatal Fury*, *Samurai Shodown*, *The King of Fighters*, and *Metal Slug*, SNK successfully carved out a niche in the competitive arcade market.

Seeking to bring their game catalogue to players on the go, SNK expanded their offerings in late 1998 with the Neo Geo Pocket (NGP). Officially released

only in Japan and some areas of Europe, the NGP was a 16-bit handheld gaming console featuring a monochrome, non-illuminated display.

In a display of bad luck or bad timing, the monochrome NGP was released in October 1998 - the same month in which Nintendo released their long-awaited Game Boy Color. SNK reacted quickly and barely four months later discontinued the monochrome model, replacing it with an updated version dubbed the Neo Geo Pocket Color (NGPC). As the name implies, the NGPC included a full-colour (though not illuminated) display running at 160x152 pixel resolution - slightly higher than the 160x144 pixels of the Game Boy Color. While the Neo Geo Pocket Color mimicked the Game Boy and other handhelds with a D-Pad and two control buttons on the front of the system, SNK went a step further. Rather than employing a more traditional cross-shaped D-pad, the NGPC featured an eight-direction direction controller which leveraged clicky, highly-tactile micro switches. While this input mechanism is tiny in comparison to a traditional arcade joystick, it successfully replicates the *feeling* of an arcade controller - a feat essentially unmatched in any other handheld gaming console before or since.

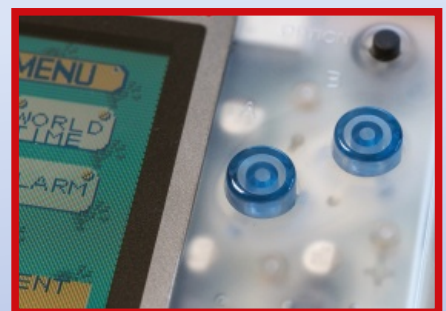
Along with the arcade-style directional controls, the NGPC had several features not typically seen in other portable consoles of that era, including the ability for the user to set their preferred language. Game progress could also be saved to a battery-backed internal memory, and even with the colour display, the NGPC could run for up to 40 hours



If a Neo Geo Pocket Color is powered on without a game cartridge inserted, it presets the user with this attractive home screen, featuring a calendar, world time clock, astrological horoscope generator, alarm clock, and a settings panel.

on a pair of AA batteries - nearly four times longer than a Game Boy Color. The NGPC also benefited from SNK's ongoing partnership with Sega, resulting in a special cable allowing a Neo Geo Pocket Color to be directly connected to the Sega Dreamcast home console for interactions between certain Dreamcast and NGPC games.

Of course, any video game console is only as good as its library of games, and this is where the NGPC both shines and suffers. SNK's deep library of arcade-style fighting and military combat games was an incredible source to draw from while building out the catalogue for their new handheld. As such, the NGPC received well-crafted ports or spin-offs of titles from beloved SNK franchises like *Metal Slug*, *Fatal Fury*, *The King of Fighters*, ▶



The primary buttons ("A" and "B") of the Neo Geo Pocket Color are found to the right of the display, and are quite responsive despite their small size.



This is the 8-direction joystick, as seen on the "Clear" Neo Geo Pocket Color variant.

NGPC colours

In keeping with the Millenium-era trend of colourful consumer electronics begun by Apple's iMac, SNK offered the Neo Geo Pocket Color in a variety of colours, including Camouflage Blue, Carbon Black, Crystal White, Platinum Blue, Platinum Silver, and Stone Blue. Additionally, Japan received an exclusive, slightly-smaller version of the system called the "New Neo Geo Pocket Color," which came clad in a translucent blue casing.

Backlight mods

The non-illuminated colour display has made the NGPC a popular system for hardware modders. In particular, kits have been offered to replace the original reflective LCD screen with modern backlit displays. While these modifications are somewhat complex and typically require soldering to complete, the results can be truly stunning, and unlike simply emulating NGPC games on modern hardware, allow a player to truly appreciate the gorgeous graphics and compelling gameplay found in the NGPC library while enjoying the NGPC's unique directional controller.

The Last Blade and Neo Turf Masters.

SNK also leaned on partners like Capcom and Sega, who released excellent games featuring their own marquee franchises and characters, including Capcom's *Rockman* (aka *Mega Man*), and Sega's *Sonic the Hedgehog Pocket Adventure*. This last title is of particular note, because it was developed in direct cooperation with Sonic creator Yuji Naka and his famed Sonic Team - the first time Sonic Team was directly involved in the creation of a Sonic title for a non-Sega console. Perhaps due to the direct involvement of Naka and Sonic Team, *Sonic the Hedgehog Pocket Adventure* for the NGPC is an *outstanding* Sonic game, with sharp graphics, clear sounds, and faithful reproduction of the blue hedgehog's trademark speed.

Unfortunately, the Neo Geo Pocket Color's time as a viable competitor to the Game Boy Color was cut short. Despite their long history of successful arcade titles, SNK was in dire financial straits. Owing in part to their over-reliance on 2D arcade fighting games (a genre declining in popularity alongside the decline of arcades) and in part to sheer corporate overreach. Along with



Despite only being on the market for a short time, the Neo Geo Pocket Color saw a surprising number of design variations for its game boxes. Neo Geo Pocket Color games sold in European countries often came in durable plastic "clamshell" cases (top left), while North American and Japanese markets mostly saw fragile cardboard boxes. Note that some games like SNK vs. Capcom: Card Fighters Clash (top right) featured an eye-catching reflective silver "Neo Geo Pocket Color" banner across the top, while standard releases like King of Fighters R-2 (lower left) did not. Finally, near the end of the Neo Geo Pocket Color's life in Japan, a handful of gambling simulators were released in extremely plain boxes with no Neo Geo Pocket Color branding or graphics at all.

their gaming products, SNK had also opened an expensive theme park in Japan which lost vast sums of money before being shuttered.

By early 2000, when the Neo Geo Pocket Color was less than a year old, SNK was sold to Aruze, a manufacturer of pachinko games and slot machines. By mid-2000, SNK had ceased operations in North America, Canada and the EU. A long series of bankruptcies, mergers, sales and acquisitions followed, and while SNK continued to publish games across their trademark franchises, their re-emergence from bankruptcy came far too late to save the Neo Geo Pocket Color, which was quietly discontinued in October 2001.

Likely due to a combination of SNK leveraging their strongest franchises and their simultaneous struggles to remain in business, the NGPC's game

library is relatively small, and skews very heavily towards 2D fighting and arcade action titles. While only 31 NGPC games were released in North America and 44 in various EU regions, the NGPC lacks any form of region protection, meaning any Neo Geo Pocket Color console can play games from any region including the 83 titles released in Japan. Fortunately, many NGPC games will respect whatever language setting the user has selected in their NGPC settings, making the system a popular choice for imported games.

As one might expect given SNK's reputation as an arcade powerhouse, the Neo Geo Pocket Color game library excels with 2D fighting games, and the system received both praise and criticism for its fighter-heavy library even at the peak of its brief lifespan. However, despite the comparatively small library of games, the NGPC features some truly excellent games across a variety of genres. Noteworthy titles include:

- *SNK Vs Capcom: The Match of the Millennium*: a franchise-mixing NGPC exclusive. *Match of the Millennium* lets players battle against a variety of characters from various SNK and Capcom franchises. Featuring sharp graphics, intuitive controls and a

Dreamcast sync

While only a handful of Neo Geo Pocket Color games supported the optional Dreamcast link cable, those which did offered some fun and interesting gameplay enhancements. For example, connecting the Dreamcast game *Capcom vs. SNK: Millennium Fight 2000* to the NGPC game *SNK vs. Capcom: Match of the Millennium* allows the player to quickly unlock all characters in the NGPC version, while also allowing points earned in the NGPC version to be spent on items in the Dreamcast game.



Andy completes a flawless victory in *Fatal Fury First Contact*.



A Neo Geo Pocket Color game (left) alongside a Game Boy game (right).



Sonic The Hedgehog Pocket Adventure is one of the standout games for the Neo Geo Pocket Color, featuring a unique collection of levels (though largely based on *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for the Sega Genesis / Mega Drive), additional play modes, and an impressive rendering of Sonic's trademark speedy movement.

large roster of 26 characters, this is a must-have for NGPC fans.

- *Puyo Pop* and *Bust-A-Move Pocket*: while the NGPC never saw an official version of *Tetris*, these titles brought addictive puzzle gameplay and adorable aesthetics to SNK's plucky handheld.
- *Biomotor Unitron*: this quirky and innovative JRPG title successfully merged traditional dungeon crawling gameplay with *Pokemon* inspired battles, gorgeous pixel-art visuals and a high-fantasy-meets-science-fiction storyline.
- *Sonic the Hedgehog Pocket Adventure*: as noted above, this unique title merges

elements of several classic Sonic games to create something both familiar and new, all while preserving the essential sense of fast-moving fun that is central to the best Sonic games.

- *SNK Vs. Capcom: Card Fighters Clash*: here we see frequent collaborators SNK and Capcom integrating their respective franchises with the collectible-card-game craze kicked off by *Magic: The Gathering*, resulting in an incredibly fun and compelling experience not found on any other console.
- *Metal Slug* and *Metal Slug Second Mission*: with these titles, SNK faithfully recreated their exciting run-n-gun arcade games, complete with huge levels, chaotic combat, and detailed backgrounds with intricate parallax scrolling effects.

Despite its short lifespan, relatively small library and non-backlit display, the NGPC is home to some truly stellar games and remains a fondly-remembered (and highly collectable) system. In fact, SNK has seen recent success with two volumes of NGPC games released for the Nintendo Switch totalling 20 games in all, with both volumes receiving strong reviews.

SNK's Neo Geo Pocket Color can

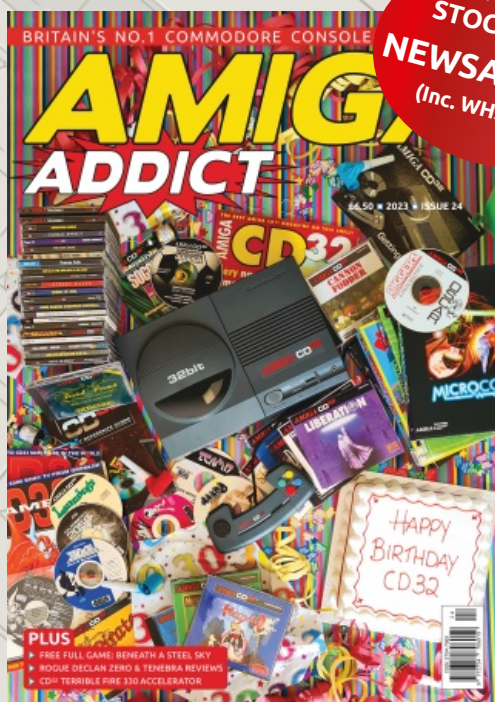
reasonably be called a failure. It never exceeded more than 2% of the handheld gaming market dominated by the Nintendo Game Boy, and largely due to SNK's financial woes, the NGPC barely lasted two years on the market. Nevertheless, its innovative controls, high-powered hardware and the overall quality of its library of games makes the quirky NGPC an oft-overlooked gem of handheld gaming. Whether on original SNK hardware or via their recent re-releases on Nintendo Switch, portable gaming fans would be well advised to explore this remarkable console.



Neo Geo Pocket Monochrome Games

The original monochrome Neo Geo Pocket was only on the market for a few months before being replaced by the Neo Geo Pocket Color. As such, only ten monochrome games were released for the system before it was discontinued. Interestingly, the differences between the NGP and NGPC were so minor, the systems are both forwards *and* backwards compatible, meaning that all ten monochrome games can be played on an NGPC, and a monochrome Neo Geo Pocket can play most NGPC games, albeit in black and white.

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HOMEBREW HEROES

- Marc's holding out for a Homebrew Hero and finds quite a few

Two Indie games are in for review in this issue, alongside the usual treats from the world of the thriving Homebrew/Indie scene.

FULL QUIET

Developer: RETROTAINTMENT GAMES
Publisher: 8 BIT-LEGIT

Format: NES
Release Date: OUT NOW

Full Quiet is touted as one of the biggest NES games ever made, but does that make for a good game? Marc gears up to find out.

Full Quiet is an open-world survival adventure, which sees you having to restore radio relay grids to find your missing son. As you navigate each part of the map, you are required to remove static, solve puzzles and defeat enemies. Puzzles include *Pipe Mania/Bioshock* style fixing pipes and having to memorise Morse code signals. There are hints along the way via radio signals and scraps of paper, but it isn't always obvious what you need to do. *Full Quiet* is a game that sometimes wants you to master the puzzles without hints. For hardcore fans of puzzles, this is great and you get a real buzz from beating them, but the difficulty curve will certainly put others off.

You can freely explore each part of the map as you wish, but puzzles will need to be tackled to open further areas up. I found that I was retracing my steps at the start, but as you get used to the game (and the map in the inventory screen) you will memorise the routes and paths that need to be traversed.

Enemies are tough right from the off, and you will need to use skill as well as your weapon to defeat them. Annoyingly, enemies respawn as soon as you leave an area so it's a constant battle with them, especially if you take a wrong turn. Luckily, you do have unlimited ammo but beware of having to reload! Controls can be overly complex at times and while there is help in the instruction manual, it didn't appear to give all the information needed.

A real strength of *Full Quiet* is the day/night cycle, with enemies getting more challenging as the darkness takes hold. Each part of the map contains a safe-house and you will want to unlock and memorise them sharpish as they act as save points. This adds an extra element of fear as you attempt to polish off puzzles and make it back to the safe-house before the sun goes down fully. Do you stray out further and risk darkness? Or do you head back for the night?

Graphically, *Full Quiet* is very impressive indeed, with amazing animations and sprites for a NES console. You have to admire what the team has done with such limited hardware.



Full Quiet gets tougher as night draws in, better find a safe house.

Overall, *Full Quiet* is a massive game that is very rewarding if you have patience and persevere through the initial parts. Don't expect to complete it in mere hours either, you may well be hooked for far longer!

PROS: Huge, open world that will take ages to explore and complete. A clever day/night cycle.

CONS: Complex controls. Objectives are not always clear.

PA
VERDICT

80%

SONG OF MORUS: GALA OF BATTLE

Developer: SUNNY CHOW Format: GAME BOY Release Date: TBC



The knives are well and truly out!

Who wants to spend ages navigating through levels just to get the boss at the end? *Song Of Morus* does away with the faff and takes you straight to the bosses.

The game is a Hong Kong-based Bossfight shooter, which sees you navigate eight boss fights, each containing three wave patterns to mix it up and keep you on your toes. Each stage will have a unique soundtrack and feel to it.

There are also several characters to choose from as well, each with their own quirks and skill sets.

There are currently no plans for a cart version but never say never!

You can play an early access version of the game at www.pixel.addict.media/SongOfMorus, with the current version featuring five of the boss levels and a handful of characters to play as.

By Marc Jowett

@marc_jowett

@marc.jowett



EXTREME VOLLEYBALL INFERNAL LEAGUE

Developer: RAPHNET TECHNOLOGIES
Format: MASTER SYSTEM
Release Date: OUT NOW

EVIL! That is your acronym for *Extreme Volleyball Infernal League*. But is it an evil genius? or a load of old balls? Marc gets ready to go extreme.

Apparently, there are two different versions of the sport of volleyball. The one involving the simple bashing of a ball over the net, and the violent one, which involves setting opponents on fire and blocking their view before smashing the ball at their face.

Extreme Volleyball falls into the latter category, and while it is at heart a simple volleyball game, the additions make it a much higher test of your skill. Move your character with the **D-pad** to keep the ball in the air, keepy-uppy style, button 1 allows you to thwack the ball with a bit more venom, and button 2 unleashes your power up. These fall from the sky at intervals and are randomly selected for you, a bit like *Mario Kart*.

Upon entering the roster screen, you will notice more than a passing resemblance to *Mortal Kombat*, with the screen looking almost identical. Should you choose tournament mode, it is even more noticeable. This mode sees you work your way past multiple opponents to



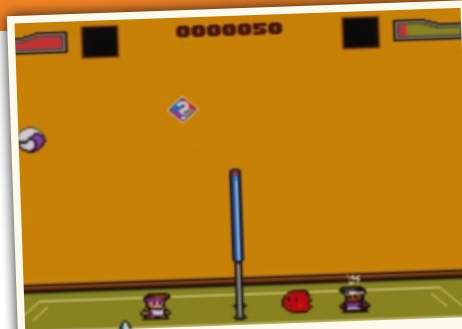
Banter is rife throughout the game.

become the ultimate champion.

Two other modes are also available. Rogueball is perhaps the most interesting and is a survival-type story mode. It sees you work your way across a grid, defeating opponents, playing bonus games and collecting power-ups such as health. The other mode, Duels, is a simple one-on-one. Pick your opponent, pick your arena and play some volleyball.

A two-player mode is present and is a welcome addition to the game, adding to the replay value as, once you have completed everything there is to see on the single-player side, there is little to entice you back.

Each character has two different



Struggling to beat your opponent? Lob a fireball at them. Simple.

attributes; speed and jump, and these vary between characters. You can also change the costume and even the ball colour if you wish.

Extreme Volleyball is a lot of fun while it lasts and is a worthy addition to the Master System library.

PROS: Plenty of modes to keep you occupied, and lots of fun.

CONS: Little replay value once you have seen it all.

PA
VERDICT **75%**

HUNTER GIRLS

Developer: PSCD GAMES
Format: NES

Release Date: KICKSTARTER SUCCESSFUL/PRE - ORDERS OPEN

Hunter Girls is a 2D endless runner game which tests your reflexes with increasing difficulty as the game progresses. The game was originally developed by Denis Lutsenko and released on Steam in 2021.

Starting with one girl named Agnes, the initial task is to simply use a shield to defend and use a sword to attack. Next up, Kim joins with her bow, and finally, Flora completes the lineup with her magic spells.

With all three girls in the fray, you have to time attacks to perfection while keeping all three safe. The shield, sword and magic have to be replenished, so

you cannot use them willy-nilly. *Hunter Girls* then becomes a test of skill, with your reflexes being key. Thankfully, the game restarts you at the nearest save point at all times, taking away any significant frustrations.

With the game already on the market, we had to ask PSCD Games if there would be any improvements to the upcoming Mega Drive version and we are happy to report that there are. PSCD tell us:

"We've tweaked the visuals, and the full-screen art, and plan to add three bosses to better tie the story together and diversify the gameplay."

"The story has been reworked a little, simplifying it from the original, since there was a lot of text, which was not needed in such a game."



A few quickfire arrows at the ogre, but be mindful of the dual against the bow and arrow below!

"We have also added the ability to play together as it would be difficult for one player to perform all the actions alone. The second player can, for example, take over all the attack functions, and the

first player, all the defensive functions and jump functions. It might even be more fun to play that way."

Having played the demo, we can certainly

see the benefit of playing with a mate, as it does get tricky controlling all three girls and utilising their skills alone. Fingers crossed by the time you are reading this, the game will be ready to roll!

COSMO KNIGHT ZION

Developer: ZEICHI GAMEPLAY SHORT

Format: GAME BOY COLOR

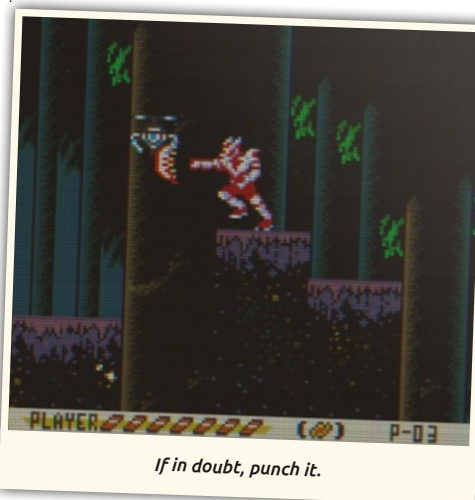
Release Date: TBC

Developer Jose Juan, better known as Zeichi, is currently working hard on the Game Boy Color title, *Cosmo Knight Zion*. *Pixel Addict* caught up with Juan to get the lowdown.

Cosmo Knight Zion is a game that is born out of a fan project that Zeichi has been working on for quite a while, titled *Saint Seiya - The Phoenix Returns*. We are told that *Cosmo Knight Zion* will improve the original game engine, enemies, music and add new elements to the storyline. The game will potentially become a completely different game, depending on Zeichi's workload.

Just what is *Cosmo Knight Zion* all about then? Zeichi tells us that, "*Cosmo Knight Zion* offers an exhilarating gameplay experience, drawing inspiration from classic platformers and action titles such as *Ninja Gaiden* and *Megaman*. Players will

traverse a vast, interconnected world, navigating through challenging platforming segments and engaging in intense battles with various enemies and formidable bosses".



If in doubt, punch it.

Sounds good to us so far. How did the game come about? Zeichi explains, "*Cosmo Knight Zion* was inspired by a blend of classic retro gaming and futuristic space themes and by the popular 1980s anime *Saint Seiya*. I wanted to create an immersive experience that combines action-packed gameplay with an engaging storyline."

Will we see a physical version of the game to add to our ever-growing indie cart collection? Zeichi offers us some encouragement, "We are currently exploring the possibility of a physical release for *Cosmo Knight Zion* as a functional GameBoy Color cartridge, as well as digital versions for consoles. However, the official release date is yet to be confirmed. We are working diligently to ensure the game meets the highest standards before making any announcements."

LOST TREASURE OF LIMA

Developer: DRDG_RETRO

Format: GAME BOY COLOR

Release Date: TBC

Based on a true legend, *Lost Treasure Of Lima* is currently well into development over at DRDG_RETRO. *Pixel Addict* sat down with Dan Robertson to find out more!

The Treasure of Lima is a legendary buried treasure reputedly removed from Lima, Peru, in 1820 and never recovered. It is estimated to be worth up to £160 million (or \$208 million) in today's money. *Lost Treasure Of Lima* puts you in the shoes of explorer Sebastian Madsen, who has set out to finally find the treasure. Environmental puzzles, exploration and sequences involving a race against the clock are all in here, spread across four levels.

Lost Treasure Of Lima aims to be a platform game that is as realistic as the legend of the treasure itself. Dan tells us, "It is a platform exploration game grounded in

reality - you'll find no moving platforms here! Inspired by my solo travels around Peru, including a six-week stint in the Amazon rainforest. I aimed to create a game with environment-rich locations that push the graphical limitations of the Game Boy Color. But this game isn't just about navigating the terrain and solving puzzles, you will also find yourself at the mercy of timed action sequences including one where you must outrun a black panther. These sections require a speed of hand and nerves of steel where one wrong button press will lead to your demise."

We are told each level will feature three additional hidden treasures, for replay value.

At Pixel Addict we were given a sneak peek at the trailer for *Lost Treasure Of Lima* before it was released to the public, and

initial impressions are very promising. We hope to get hold of a demo soon to give the game a thorough going over.

Drdg_Retro have been working on the title for over a year and the team are hoping to nail down a release date early next year. Dan tells us he is currently seeking a publisher for the title, so it can be given a physical release. If you want to find out more about the legend of the treasure, you can do so here: www.pixel.addict.media/TreasureOfLima



Of course, you will. Curiosity and all that.



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LEMMINGS

- Small certainly is beautiful ... and addictive

Many games start with a clear idea and then get refined until it reaches its final form. *Lemmings*, however, was different. It came about more by chance, a series of unexpected events leading to a classic game.

The digital journey of the titular creatures, the lemmings, began in August 1989. DMA Design was working on *Walker* when Scott Johnson, a new freelance artist, set about designing tiny characters for the game's robot to target. Initially they were supposed to fit in a 16x16 pixel box, but Mike Dailly had a different idea, suggesting even tinier characters. This friendly challenge led to the creation of the miniature characters fitting in an 8x8 pixel box that soon became the talk of DMA Design as more people started to invent new ways to annihilate them.

Russell Kay christened them Lemmings

and recognized their potential. He used them to demonstrate the landscape-following mechanics, leading to the initial game demo.

The game's premise was straightforward: players were tasked with assigning roles to lemmings who, devoid of fear, would march forward relentlessly towards whatever hazards were placed in their way. The objective was to ensure their safe passage to the exit. Players had a limited set of roles to allocate, some temporary such as bridge-building, and others offering permanent abilities, such as climbing or floating. The game's level editor drew inspiration from *Deluxe Paint*, an art program well-known and favored by the team. This familiarity streamlined the level creation process, becoming a pivotal factor in the game's success. It ignited a friendly competition among the crew as they crafted levels. Interestingly, while many challenging stages were designed initially, the final game is celebrated for its gentle learning curve. Each lemming role is thoughtfully introduced in a beginner-friendly level, gradually ramping up the challenge.

The game's sound, masterfully crafted

by Brian Johnson, added a unique charm to *Lemmings*. In the early 1990s, as the gaming industry began to grapple with the complexities of copyright infringement, the team opted for a cautious approach. To sidestep potential copyright violations, the music was deliberately kept simple. However, this didn't prevent the incorporation of timeless melodies, drawing inspiration from classics like Offenbach's "Can-Can" and the traditional "London Bridge is Falling Down". These tunes, combined with memorable sound effects - including Scott's mother's voice for the lemmings - enriched the gaming experience, making it even more engaging.

Despite the original *Lemmings* game having over 100 levels, more were on the horizon. *Oh No! More Lemmings* came out

Walker

Today, Walker may not be widely known, given its exclusivity to the Amiga platform. With its unique control scheme combining joystick/keyboard and mouse, players took control of the massive AG-9 robot, the titular Walker. Their mission? Simple yet exhilarating: obliterate anything that moves.

Lemmings games

1991: *Lemmings*
1993: *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*
1994: *All New World of Lemmings*
1995: *3D Lemmings*
2000: *Lemmings Revolution*

It's (almost) never too late to open the umbrella.



The game gently introduces new roles.

Lemmings



Climber Floater Bomber Blocker Builder Basher Miner Digger



Levels made by Gary Timmons concentrated on the puzzles instead of graphics.

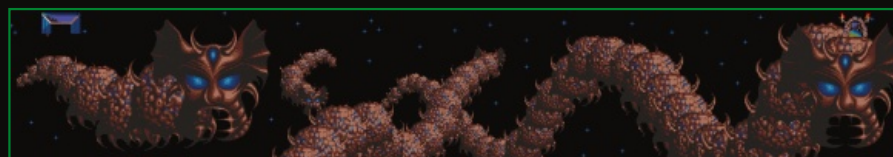
just a few months after the original, bringing even more fun. As the years progressed, the franchise ventured into new territories with sequels that dabbled in 3D and introduced new gameplay mechanics. None of them quite captured the magic of the original though. The initial game's enduring charm is evident in its widespread release across numerous platforms. Despite the attempts to innovate and expand the franchise, the original 2D levels of *Lemmings* remain unparalleled in their appeal, standing as a testament to the game's timeless allure.

Two-Player Mode

While the age-old debate of Amiga vs. PC raged on, the Amiga version of *Lemmings* had a cheeky ace up its sleeve: a two-player mode. Thanks to Amiga's ability to support two mice at once - a feature conspicuously absent on the PC - players could dive into split-screen competitions. So, while PC users were left playing solo, Amiga fans could ask, "Why play alone when you can share the fun?"



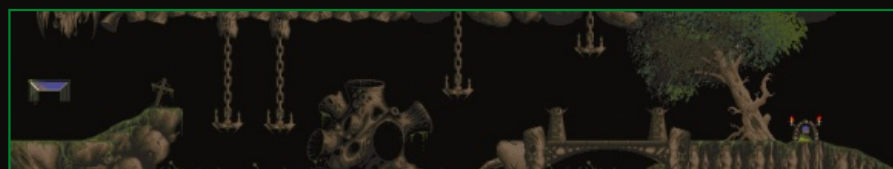
Shadow of the Beast tribute level.



Awesome (1990) tribute level.



Menace tribute level.



Shadow of the Beast II tribute level.



Lemming (Lemmus lemmus)

Lemmings are small rodents predominantly found in or near Arctic tundra biomes. Contrary to popular belief, their fur isn't green but rather varies between shades of brown and black. A longstanding myth suggests that lemmings commit mass suicide by jumping off cliffs. In reality, this behavior stems from their migratory instincts. When population density becomes too high, lemmings may migrate in large groups. They are capable swimmers, but sometimes they might attempt to cross bodies of water that are too vast, leading to drownings. This behavior has been misconstrued as suicidal tendencies. Notably, the myth was further popularized by the 1958 Disney film *White Wilderness*, where the behavior was staged. In essence, while lemmings do have strong migratory urges, they certainly don't intentionally commit mass suicide.

So, next time you fail to save those digital critters in the game, remember: it's not the lemmings' suicidal tendencies at fault - it's all on you, the player! No pressure, right?

— WHAT WAS ONCE OLD, IS NEW AGAIN —

- Games studio Neo Byte Force tell us how they always come out fighting

Welcome back yet again my fellow Pixel Addicts. You might be thinking what, you're covering the Neo Geo again? Well, a lot has happened in the Neo Geo indie game scene since we last featured the console. There's a brand-new team of developers who already have a game developed and released for Neo Geo, but as I write, they are also working on a second title for the platform.

Their first release - *Eye of the Typhoon* by Viacom - was an unfinished versus fighter that was planned for release on the Neo Geo MVS in 1996. Eventually, the game received a release for both the Panasonic 3DO and MS-DOS, but in South Korea only.

After years of sitting in obscurity, developer Johnny 16bit decided to pick up the torch and finish the game, without even having any prior notes for the MVS version by the developer to go by. The main game was not only finished, but completely playable. The finishing touches to complete the game were ideas that Johnny 16bit and his team came up with during development and it received a release earlier this year.

Another set of AES and MVS pre-orders for *Eye of the Typhoon* will be made

Just two of the 8 badasses in Cyber Force.



This promotional flyer has a Terminator 2 vibe to it.

available soon (around September or October of this year), with a possible release date of January 2024.

Neo Byte Force's second game is complete and will be entering the beta testing stage soon. *Cyborg Force* is a 2D run 'n' gun shmup with eight selectable characters that resemble SNK's *Cyber-Lip/Metal Slug* series with a similar graphical style. The gameplay itself is currently under wraps and very little has been mentioned about it, but gameplay videos are expected to show up soon.

We got in contact with Johnny 16bit and Ozzy from Neo Byte Force to ask some questions about the most recent projects. We would like to thank Johnny 16bit for taking time out of his busy schedule, so you - dear reader - can get the latest scoop on these incredible releases for SNK's 2D powerhouse, the Neo Geo.

What inspired you to develop games for the Neo Geo?

Ozzy: I guess it's for fun since the very beginning, the Neo Geo has all the interesting features when compared with modern games development. It's 16/32-bits, versatile specs, it's targeting both arcade and home console gaming and there's a nice community around.

And of course it's driven by one of the most powerful CPUs ever made, the 68000!!

How difficult was it to learn how to program the Neo Geo?

Not that difficult when you are coming from the Commodore 64 scene, it's a fun fact that all our games are written in plain C anyway.

If someone is interested in following in your footsteps, what tools do they need to program SNK's 2D beast?

Maybe Neo Geo programming is more suited for experienced standalone coders rather than beginners, creating and customising your own tools tailored to your needs will be your everyday work.

There are multiple SDKs available for Neo Geo development, we are using our own customised *NEODEV* SDK. As an alternative (even though I'm not using it) I strongly recommend newcomers to try and use *Datlib* from HPMAN:

www.pixel.addict.media/NeoGeo

The Neo Geo dev wiki should be also your new Bible:

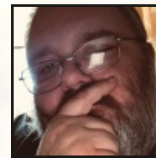
www.pixel.addict.media/wikiNeoGeo



Never be that close to someone with a big gun!



Cyber Force was clearly inspired by SNK's Cyber Lip for the Neo Geo.



Another victim! I say you have 'one' chance to beat me!

Finally, when you feel ready and confident, why not try to implement your own displaySprite implementation? It should help with getting a better overview of the machine.

Your first game, *The Eye of Typhoon*, was an unfinished project that began life as a 3DO release. Why did you choose this title to be your first Neo Geo release and what content remained that had to be finished?

Johnny 16Bit (J16): *The Eye of Typhoon* is one of those unreleased prototypes that make many fans of the Neo Geo dream, but unlike others it was released to other platforms. Also its assets had at least partly been ripped by the community so we had access to most of the sounds and graphics. That's what we had access to, and what seduced us in the first place. They were typical of the era, had a lot of charm to them and showed great talent from the artists at Viccom, the original Korean developer. Rather than speaking about "content that remained to be finished", I'd rather say that the sound and graphics were what we started from. We remade the game from the ground up, using these incomplete assets. We filled a lot of gaps, made some now relatively infamous additions, and never referred to the original gameplay in order to make our own thing. The only compromises are technical ones. As we knew the project would only ever be a fan-game, we didn't bother about things such as intellectual property. I think the end result is pretty uncommon.

Where can people order *Eye of the Typhoon* for Neo Geo and how much does it cost?

That is another uncommon feature: the ROM we made is absolutely free. It can be downloaded from the project's itch.io page (<https://ozzyouzo.itch.io/teot>). We



Pow!

did go all the way and made AES and MVS kits, but they were only for friends and family as it can't be a commercial release. There are way too many IP infringements to list! Starting with the rights to the original game, which belongs to Viccom, and that they have recently reissued for the PC and 3DO.

What can you tell our readers about your new Neo Geo game, *Cyborg Force*?

It's our first official game, it's a run 'n' gun and it rocks! It's designed as an arcade game for the nostalgic adults we have become, without any compromise to modernity. I like to think that if Cannon Films had made video games, they would have looked a bit like *Cyborg Force*. We hope you'll find that you feel you could have played it in the early 1990s. It's meant to be easy to get into, yet hard to master; to feel familiar, yet reveal a few gameplay twists as you get more seriously into it. We had a lot of fun making this game, and we're very happy and proud of how it turned out. Its history is going to be in the hands of the public soon.

Would you say *Metal Slug* inspired the creation of this game?

Ha! It's hard not to immediately think of *Metal Slug* when it comes to run 'n' guns and the Neo Geo. Yet, if there is a Neo Geo game *Cyborg Force* references, it's *Cyber-Lip*, if only for the cheesy sci-fi action flick theme.

What else do you have planned for the Neo Geo platform, if you can tell us?

The success of *Cyborg Force* will strongly impact what we can or cannot do, and we want to port it to several systems (like the PSP or Dreamcast) before moving on, so it's early to tell. But we have started evaluating several possibilities... I'd love to use the experience gained to



Eye of the Typhoon's graphics remind me of Fatal Fury Special and Samurai Shodown 2!

do another fighting game at some point - possibly reviving existing assets, as we did with *The Eye of Typhoon*...

You're living a dream come true that is still a fantasy for most people! Any advice on how to make it a reality for someone who is highly interested in the Neo Geo indie game scene?

Honestly, seeing our first game played at the Mikado Game Centre in Tokyo was beyond our dreams. I was lucky, in the first place, to meet a like-minded coder, and then I worked hard. So, being lucky is hardly good advice... I can only recommend working hard and make it happen!

And there you have it, fellow Pixel Addicts! Ozzy and Johnny 16bit are contributing to keep the Neo Geo indie scene alive, and we here at *Pixel Addict* can't thank them enough. Here is to the release of *Cyborg Force*; its success; and future games by these two talented gents. As a hardcore Neo Geo gamer myself, I can't wait to get my hands on *Cyborg Force* and review it for you.

Until then, my friends - game on!



Well, well... it looks like Geese Howard is the boss here too (not really). Nice clothes!

BBG ENTERTAINMENT

- Paul hears why there will always be demand for family games

BBG Entertainment have been supplying games for 15 years now. Employing staff with decades of experience in the casual and retro gaming markets, they know their target audience. They have three games scheduled for release this year.

Paul caught up with BBG Entertainment President, Stephan Berendsen to find out more about their plans.



Thanks for joining us in what seems like a very busy year for BBG Entertainment. How has the year been so far for you in regards to your plans for new products?

Yes, you are right. This year is a very busy year for us. We have never released three games within one year before.

Dynablaster was always on our list for this year. But, as we were able to acquire the IP rights of *Astrosplash* and *Shark! Shark!* from Intellivision Entertainment LLC at the beginning of this year, our schedule for this year became much busier. Many people are awaiting the new modernised versions of *Astrosplash* and *Shark! Shark!*.



Dynablaster will bring out the competitive side of friendships.

Therefore we want to make them happy and release these two games this year.

Gamers of a certain age will recognise the aforementioned upcoming titles. What made you decide to release these particular games for a new (and old) audience?

We have been in touch with Intellivision since 2019. We loved their concept for their new Amico family console and family games from the beginning. Therefore, we decided to port our games, *Dynablaster* and *BrainDuel/Einstein Brain Trainer*, to their Amico console.

Within this great cooperation we have been able to see and test a few other new Intellivision games including *Astrosplash* and *Shark! Shark!*. We immediately loved to play these two famous games. We had the idea to bring these games to a wider audience and to port them to existing consoles and PC platforms.

After a longer discussion and negotiations with Intellivision Entertainment LLC we have been able to make a deal with them. Now BBG owns both beloved IPs.

With the Intellivision Amico experiencing problems, did that make you more determined to have the above titles on

other machines? Any Amico feedback was usually positive when it came to your games.

Our own game titles, *Dynablaster* and *BrainDuel/Einstein Brain Trainer*, have never been planned as Amico only titles. We never gave Intellivision any exclusivity and we financed the whole development by ourselves. But the whole Intellivision team, especially Tommy Talarico and Mike Dietz, helped us a lot. They came up with many great game ideas and visual concepts. Without them, *Dynablaster* would not be where it is now! Tommy also composed the music and sound for *Dynablaster*.

You've previously released an updated version of *Boulder Dash*. From the start, do you have ideas ready to enhance classic games? For example *Dynablaster* has new co-operative modes which adds more lifespan to the purchase.

Yes, we love classic games and we want to keep them popular. When I was a kid we played all these famous retro games in the arcade halls and on our home computers (Sharp MZ-80K). I still prefer these classic titles compared to all the new games. These classic games have a unique and timeless game engine/concept which works even over four decades.

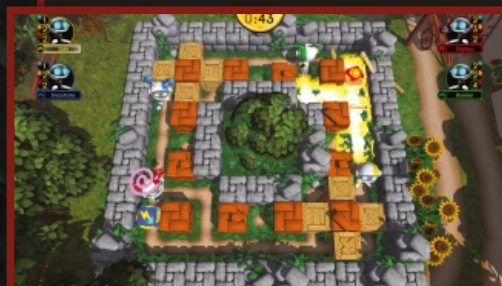
Boulder Dash will turn 40 years old next year. It was great to see that at our *Boulder Dash* booth at the gamescom 2019 many young people enjoyed playing the original and our new *Boulder*



As time runs out the playing arena shrinks, helping force a winner.



Dynablaster offers a variety of locations to battle in.



So Yellow ate the beans for lunch!



BBG Entertainment want to get the whole family involved playing their titles.



Shark! Shark!, you'll want to stay off the menu!

Dash Deluxe version. This shows that a classic game engine works. We are already working on a new *Boulder Dash 40th Anniversary* version for next year. Many new ideas but also old original features will be included

What can gamers expect from your latest games? Are there any original versions, trophies or Easter eggs hidden away?

There are some Easter eggs (smiles). You just wait, you won't be disappointed.

BBG is showing a great history of bringing out games for the family which everyone can enjoy. Has that always been a key aim for yourself?

When I started BBG our aim was to develop a scientific brain training game. We have cooperated with Dr. Kawashima, who is a Professor and neurologist.

In 2009 we released our PC game *Train your Brain with Dr. Kawashima*. In 2017

we were able to buy all the IP rights of *Boulder Dash*. This changed our company's direction allowing us to focus more on retro games. But our games have always been designed for the whole family.

You've been involved in the games industry for over two decades now, including a lot of experience in mobile gaming. What are your thoughts on how the industry has gone from big studios and the games must be bigger & better mentality, then returning to smaller teams and in some cases individual coders?

It's been a very interesting time, especially over the last decade. I personally feel there are games I can play with my kids, as not every game is shooting, driving or football anymore.

I started to develop games more than 40 years ago. We developed games for Japanese home computers. At this time, games were developed by one person - maybe with support of a graphic and sound designer. And I think some of these games are legendary and need to be preserved.

For me, classic games are more engaging and I prefer how they were

developed - cultivated by small teams with big ideas. Luckily, smartphones levelled the playing field again for both individual and smaller development teams. It has been great to see and I believe it has brought more innovation to games development in general.

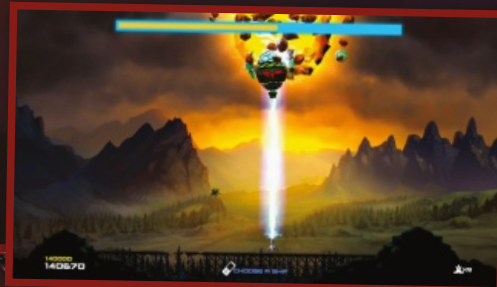
While the App Store is dominated by larger companies these days, there have been some fantastic mobile games developed by individual people in the past decade.

To end, what are some of your own favourite games from over the years?

Of course, my favourite games include: *Boulder Dash*, *Sokoban*, *Tetris*, *Pac-Man*, *Lady Bug*, *Galaxians*, *Bomberman* and *Nectaris*.

Stephan, thanks for your time today and good luck with all the launches!

A break from falling rocks but it's boss time!



Get those asteroids blasted as quickly as possible in *Astrosplash*.

Power-ups make the challenge a little easier.

CLASSICS REVISITED: SUPER MARIO BROS.

- Alan looks at just how Super this underdog plumber turned out to be...

Over the past few editions I have been revisiting classic games and assessing how well they have stood the test of time. This month I wanted to pay tribute to the Famicom - which celebrated its 40th anniversary in July 2023 (Ed. - "Wow - am I really that old?!").

The Famicom was Nintendo's cartridge console for the third generation and was originally launched in Japan in 1983. It was then redesigned and re-launched as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) for its roll out across the USA and then Europe during 1985-1987. Although slightly different machines, they did run the same 8-bit games, and with the help of Sega's Master System they can claim significant credit for the explosion in the

home gaming market in the late 1980s.

In honour of the Famicom's milestone birthday I will be talking about how *Super Mario Bros.* - the game that changed gaming forever, became the must-have title for the NES and went on to break sales records for fun.

Are You Living In A Cave?

It is hard to imagine that there could be anyone on the planet that hasn't heard of Mario, and a brief venture into the murky world of the interweb only serves to confirm just how insanely popular Nintendo's poster-boy has become. A bit of Googling directed me to a number of gaming sites that had compiled various charts, lists and polls. And you don't need me to tell you where this is going...

The most iconic video games character of all time? - Mario.

The 25 most popular video game characters of all time? Number one was, yep you guessed it - Mario.

The video game character to appear in the most games? Once again, Mario sits



Don't leave that coin behind - coins equal extra lives...

on top of the pile, with an astonishing 275 game library under his belt, released for the various Nintendo consoles and handhelds dating back to the Game and Watch units from 1982.

Gaming Royalty?

Created by Shigeru Miyamoto and voiced by Charles Martinet, Mario has become an undisputed legend of video gaming. And I would venture to suggest that it was *Super Mario Bros.* that really cemented his place in history.

Mario made his original debut in the 1981 arcade classic *Donkey Kong*, and then appeared in the single-screen wraparound arcade platform game *Mario Bros.* in 1983. But it was *Super Mario Bros.* that catapulted him into superstardom. The game was released for the Famicom in 1985 and on arcade machines and the NES in USA and Europe in 1986-1987. It didn't just rewrite the gaming rule-book; it tore it up and started again, including many gameplay elements that we later took for granted but at the time were quite unusual, pretty special and brilliantly executed.

It helped pioneer side-scrolling platform games (it wasn't the first - that honour goes to *Jump Bug* from 1981, but it was



Your journey begins...



The crisp, clear visuals made the game an instant favourite.

the first side scrolling platformer to achieve stratospheric popularity). It also made great use of hidden blocks and secrets, some of which were pretty mind-blowing for the time; none more so than the ability to jump outside of the apparent play area and run along the top of the screen to reach warp-zones and other secret areas. The first time I achieved this I genuinely thought I'd found a bug in the game!

None of this was unique. Easter eggs had been regularly appearing in games since the 1970s (with Atari's *Adventure* perhaps being the best known example). But combine them with flawless execution, slickness, and sheer playability and you have a game that became the undisputed *killer-app* for the Famicom and the NES.

Record Breakers

Let's talk sales for a moment, and we ought to - since the numbers are breathtaking. Even by today's standards the figures are remarkable, but they are even more impressive when you consider that this is a release from almost 40 years ago - a time when home video gaming was proportionately more expensive and significantly less accessible than it is today. The original NES game sold over 40 million units by the year 2000. If we factor in ports and re-releases it is estimated that in excess of 58 million units have now sold worldwide. These numbers earned it a Guinness World Record as the best-selling video game of all time, and it carried this title proudly until it was finally dethroned by *Wii Sports* in 2006.

We All Remember Our First Time...

I remember playing the game when it was first released in the United Kingdom. There was an arcade machine in the leisure centre where I used to play five-a-side football early on Sunday mornings. As I became increasingly proficient I had to get up earlier and earlier to allow sufficient time for my pre-match video gaming session, eventually arriving more than an hour before we were due to play to fit a full game in!

This was the first arcade machine I remember where coins bought time on the machine, rather than a specific number of credits, presumably because a skilled player could make a single game last an hour or more!

Confession Time

However, I must confess that



The palette changes as you progress but the clean graphics are a constant.

this is not really a true revisit. For this feature I will usually boot up a game that I haven't played in years, to see if it is still as good as I remember or whether my memory is playing tricks on me. But I don't need to revisit *Super Mario Bros.* because I still play it often. I keep returning to it, even now, simply because it is just so bloody good.

I Don't Use This Word Often...

In fact, *good* doesn't do it justice. We are talking *off-the-scale extraordinary*. We are talking *jaw-dropping exquisiteness*. (Ed. - "Steady on!") This is a game that changed an industry. The design, the gameplay, the difficulty, the learning curve, and the graphics and sound (for the time) are all perfect. And that is not a word I throw around with abandon. But it is, quite literally, gaming perfection. Give me the game and a magic wand and I would change nothing.

It is normal for a *Pixel Addict* game review to conclude with individual scores for *Graphics*, *Sound*, *Grab Factor* and *Playability*, along with a *Verdict* final score. But that would be pointless; they would all be 100%. I literally cannot fault it. When I review a platform game, even in 2023, I *always* compare it to *Super Mario Bros.* This game is my personal barometer for gameplay, my litmus test against which



If you can get to the top of the screen you can find the secret warp zone.



Cross the bridge quickly but watch out for flying fish...

platform games will forever be measured. I have played a fair number over the years, with many Mario games among them (of course). But while they have grown in complexity and in later years have become increasingly impressive by throwing 3D and high definition graphics into the mix, none have nailed the gameplay experience quite as flawlessly as the original *Super Mario Bros.*

In a running feature last year, the editors of *Pixel Addict* voted *Doom* as the greatest classic video game of all time (Ed. - "Except Andrew, he wanted *Lemmings!*"). When making the judgement, all sorts of factors were considered. *Doom* won through (against some astonishingly stiff competition) in part due to its defining role in history, and by helping drive both the popularity of network gaming and the first person shooter genre. While it would be completely out of character for me to disagree with my fellow editors (Ed. - "Stop it Grapes - you are killing me!"), for me, if I am rating straightforward pick up-and-play gaming genius, *Super Mario Bros.* takes the crown. Classic video gaming simply does not get any better.

A belated *happy birthday* Famicom. And thank you.



Mario couldn't help but feel that his attempts at gardening had gone badly wrong...

THE MAKING OF JAKE MAGNUS HYPER-MAN

By Adrian Browne

- Jake Magnus! Faster, Stronger, Deadlier!

www.pixel.addict.media/adrianbrowne

Wrath of Khan#7667



Adrian Brown who heads up our toy pages is also a big comic book fan. For many kids growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, comics were a staple of their week. *Eagle*, *Battle*, *The Beano* and *Buster* were just a few telling several stories each issue. Adrian and artist Nathan Webb have worked together on their own adventure and action hero. Here they share a few words about it, followed by the first two pages of the strip. Take it away...

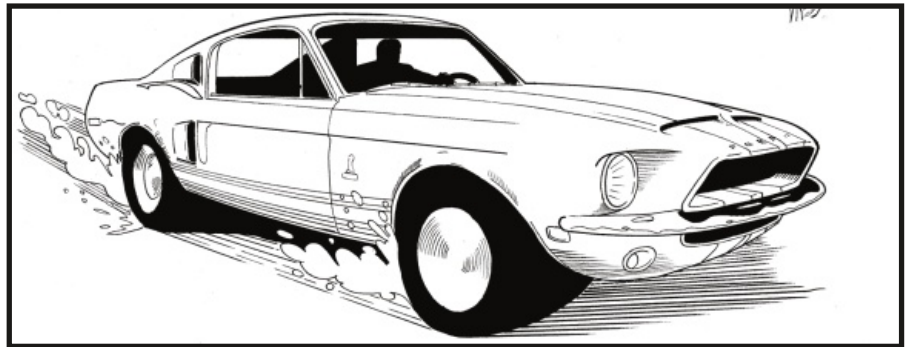
As a writer my initial inspiration was to mash together seminal T.V. series such as *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Fall Guy*. I figured that with Jake's dual professions of stuntman and bionic secret agent we would be able to tell different kinds of stories; jumping in and out of both worlds and occasionally bringing them together. I wanted to create a fun brisk adventure with plenty of action, humour and suspense and crucially marry it to a solid plot.

The world of Jake Magnus was very intentionally set in the 1970s as a possible antidote to modern life - because I believe that it's a fun and nostalgic era that we can all relate to. It also allows me to mine popular culture of the time for humorous purposes; with oblique references to movie stars, films or other cherished cultural elements. So we get spies, muscle cars, cybernetic enhanced men, femme fatales, advanced retro style tech, ninjas, androids, international espionage and so much more - in fact the sky's the limit.

Jake Magnus is a character who will always



This Jake Magnus promotional poster (also see facing page) was illustrated by Nathan Webb.



Jake's beloved muscle car with all mod cons including being 100% bulletproof!

do the right thing but he's not perfect. He loves the ladies, embraces the high life, has a laconic sense of humour and tends to speak in contractions - he's no fool but he's not the heavily read type. He a retired stuntman, and actor on a popular T.V. show called *High Speed*. He loves taking risks as stuntmen do and it doesn't help that his roguish father Jason Magnus, also a retired stuntman, sometimes assists Jake in his adventures.

Orson Sten is Jake's boss as the head of high tech outfit *Stronghold*. Stronghold was created to protect the world from unique forms of danger that other organizations were simply ill equipped to deal with. Jake was reborn in a secret surgical procedure dubbed *Parandrus* which transformed him into a *Hyper-Man*.

Whenever I create a new comic-book I always leave things unsaid, spaces in the narrative that can later be fleshed out, such as Jake's C.I.A past or even room for new characters to appear - in short I world build. One important part of this process is creating interesting and credulous names for characters, places, technology or any given, story element.



Nathan developed his energetic style whilst studying under artist Ron Tiner of *2000AD* and *Hellblazer* fame.

Hyper-Man though literally sprung from my imagination as I figured the *Hyper* part implied an enhanced or vastly energized type of man.

Nathan's thoughts on the promotional image: I looked at several cult icons with similar themes, like James Bond and the Terminator T-800 to get a feel for how the promotional art should look. Then I did a rough sketch on A4 paper. I checked in with the writer to make sure he was happy with the image and made a few adjustments to suit his tastes. I then scanned the sketch into my laptop and played around with the picture in *Photoshop* making the required adjustments. I then printed out the picture onto A3 and using a light box traced the picture, adding more details and tightening up the art. After I'd finished drawing the picture with a pencil, I then went over it with a variety of different ink pens. Then I scanned the black and white A3 art into my laptop and corrected any ink mistakes on *Photoshop*. Finally using *Layers* I added colour to the image. This is the same process that I use to create the actual comic-book pages.

There's potential in this world for many different types of stories; grounded every day tales and those with a definite sci-fi edge. The trick is to not "Jump the shark" and go too far to either side - avoid the realm of the preposterous yet leave doors open for future tales. I hope that the readership will enjoy part 1 of our story *Supremacy* which begins in this very issue.

www.pixel.addict.media/JakeMagnusFB
(JAKE MAGNUS FACEBOOK PAGE)

www.instagram.com/nathan_we66
(ARTISTS INSTAGRAM PAGE)

www.linkedin.com/in/adrian-browne-8679a95b/
(MY LINKED-IN)



WRITER: ADRIAN BROWNE ART: NATHAN WEBB

JAKE MAGNUS

PART 1

THE HYPER MAN





YEAH
HILARIOUS! QUIT
JOKING AROUND
GUYS.

NINJA TYRANT'S
WRAPPED FOR
THE DAY!



OWW!!!

WAIT A
DAMN MINUTE!
THIS IS
REAL?!



WELL IF
IT AIN'T THE
KAWA-KOOKY
CLAN.

YOU BOYS
SURE ARE A LONG WAY
FROM HOME!



SILENCE GAJINI!
NO LONGER WILL YOU DISRESPECT
THE KAWASUKI CLAN.

FOR WITH
YOUR DEATH WE
WILL AVENGE OUR MOST
HONOURABLE
MASTER!

OH YEAH...
SORRY ABOUT THAT!
BUT... HE KINDA DESERVED
KILLING!



WHAT WITH
THAT BUSINESS OF
ATTEMPTING TO FATALLY
POISON AN ENTIRE CITY'S
WATER SUPPLY
AND ALL.



OOHI SNUGLY
PINNED! JUST LIKE THOSE
LITTLE TRIANGULAR COCKTAIL
SANDWICHES!

VIA A.R.C.
ADVANCED
RADIO
COMMUNICATIONS



HELLO
JAKE.

HEY IF IT
ISN'T THE LOVELY
MISS DAVIDS.

WHY I
CAN ALMOST SMELL
THAT SWEET PERFUME
FROM HERE.

HMMM... IF
IT ISN'T THE BEST
STUNTMAN ON
TELEVISION!

AND DON'T
FORGET HANDSOME
TOO!

HAH, HAH!
SO... UM... JAKE
SOMETHING URGENTS COME UP
AND ORSON NEEDS YOU IN THE
OFFICE RIGHT AWAY!

HMM...
I WONDER WHAT ORSON'S
GOT UP HIS SLEEVE
THIS TIME.



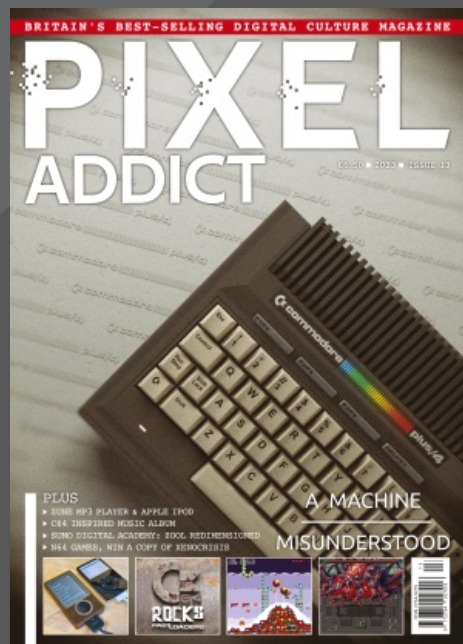


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ZZAP LIVE 2023

- Trains, Games and... Pies?

By Simon Butler

www.dinosaur-pie.co.uk

[dinosaur1957](#)



Saturday August 12th saw me dragging these old bones out of bed at some ungodly hour in order to get washed, dressed and fed prior to meeting my son-in-law on an unsurprisingly empty train into Liverpool where we then met up with the stalwart Mr Brian Dickinson.

Saddened to discover that alcoholic beverages were unavailable at such an hour, we got the second train of the day on a reasonably swift trip to Wolverhampton where we were collected by Jamie Murray, and en masse we proceeded to the Trumpton-esque market town of Kenilworth for all manner of Commodore related capers.

We were welcomed with great fervour by event organiser, Mr Chris Wilkins and his family, and ushered swiftly into the first of many rooms filled with a vast array of doodads of all shape and size, some familiar and some not, but all of great interest.

Within thirty minutes of arrival, I was thrust onto the talk-circuit with the ever wonderful Steven "Jolly" Thompson and one Peter Clarke, a musical chappie who I had never met until that very moment but who had a brief stint at Ocean, hence our gathering to share memories and a variety of anecdotes from the Manchester powerhouse of the eighties. Apart from me referring to Mr Clarke as Paul at one point in our presentation, things seemed to go rather well, although my views on the Salford Quay days of Ocean and how in my opinion the brand had been more than tarnished by ineptitude and a lack



There were plenty of recent Commodore games to purchase.

of cooperation, mixed with a complete lack of vision seemed to rattle a few hardcore fans. But sometimes it's best to see the whole picture rather than peep at one section through rose tinted glasses.

Regardless of early morning sensationalism, the day went swimmingly well, with a host of friendly faces and more things to do and see than you could shake a stick at.

All the usual suspects were present, Mr Craig Turner was as large as life as always and there with but a smidgeon of his vast collection of hardware that is excellently represented in his forthcoming publication. Jeff Minter was pressing the flesh with all and sundry prior to a public talk later in the day, as was the inimitable Jon

Hare and a host of other scene alumni.

Such was the whirlwind nature of the proceedings and the seemingly never-ending number of people coming up to me to say hello and generally shoot the breeze (albeit briefly) on any number of topics, I forgot to take any photographs, but the memories were captured by just about everyone else and are there on social media for all to see.

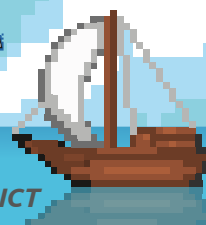
The day flew by, punctuated importantly for health's sake with my son-in-law and I wandering the local area in search of sustenance with our efforts amply rewarded in a local tavern via a steak and ale pie as big as my head which I must admit came dangerously close to defeating my dining skills.

Back at the proceedings, things were wheeling by at a rate of knots with everything magnificently organised by the Fusion Retro team. There was a whole slew of things prepared for the evening, but one day of such thrills and spills is sufficient for these old bones so at five o'clock we started what we foolishly thought was a well-planned trip back to Liverpool.

Another fine Fusion Retro event that will hopefully be repeated time and again for all those who love their old-school madness. 🐉



LEFT: Our editor Paul met Steve Jarratt, Commodore Format chat ensued! RIGHT: Mr Butler led the Ocean talk.



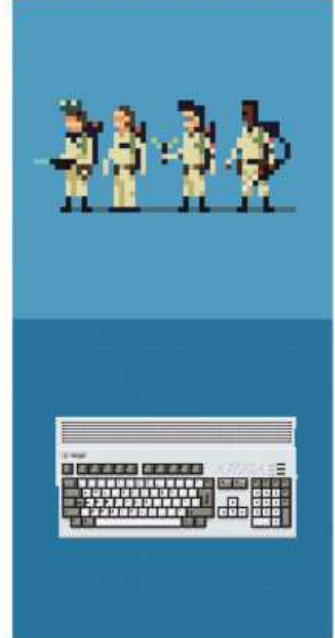


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PIXEL ADDICT PRESENTS

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